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BOSTON BOB THE SPORT DETECTIVE



THE SPORT DETECTIVE IN GRAND GULCH.

OR,
The Queer Hand "The
Professor" Played.
A ROMANCE OF GRAND GULCH.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS,
AUTHOR OF "THE DRUMMER DETECTIVE,"
"SHEPHERD'S EYE," "THE GIANT HORSEMAN,"
"MAD SHARP, THE RUSTLER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
A MYSTERY FROM BOSTON.
"YOU'RE a durned coward!"
"And you are a liar!"
"What? I'll—" "Look out, Jim! He hez ther drop on yer!"
The place, a saloon-grocery in a mining-camp
in Southern Arizona. The characters, several
miners, who, having finished their work for the
day, were gathered in the saloon of Arch Mor-
row, according to custom, to drink, gamble, or
quarrel, as it might happen.

The two men who had exchanged the courtesies with which this chapter begins were as widely different in appearance as was consistent with the general resemblance of their rough dress. Both wore the coarse, blue woolen shirts, the heavy jean trousers tucked in the boots, and the broad slouch hat that are found most convenient for mining operations.

But, there the likeness ended. The man whom one of the bystanders had called Jim was a big, heavy-set person of perhaps forty years of age. His face was almost concealed by the beard and whiskers which were allowed to grow at their own sweet will; his eyes were deep-set under bushy eyebrows, and his bullet-shaped head, set firmly and squarely on a thick neck, betokened great strength, as well as a not over-subtle intellect. Jim was, in fact, a typical desperado, and looked more like a bull-dog at bay than anything else as he cowered before the six-shooter pointed at his head by his antagonist.

This antagonist was a young man of not more than thirty. His clear-cut features, crisply-curling fair hair, and pink-and-white complexion were rather those of a young man reared amid the comforts of a well-to-do city home than of a delver for gold in the mud and sand of Arizona wilds. If he was not a real gentleman, then he certainly belied his appearance.

A half-dozen miners were standing around the two men who were now the center of interest, but no one tried to interfere in their dispute.

"Ther dude hez him, sure. Jim Townley may ez well tell us whar he'd like ter be planted," observed a sepulchral-looking chap with a smooth, yellow face, and piercing black eyes, as he lay back against the wall in an easy position to watch the outcome of the quarrel.

"Shut yer lantern-jaw, will yer?" interposed Arch Morrow, from behind the bar.

"I ain't doin' nothin'," answered the lantern-jawed man, humbly.

"Wal, mind yer don't," was the ungracious retort. "I'll teach yer, Mat Clark, that I'm er-runnin' this hyer ranch."

Not a word had the dude and the man he had covered with his gleaming silver-plated six-shooter exchanged till now. Then Jim Townley growled:

"Ef yer er-goin' ter shoot, do it an' be done with it."

A sneer curled the lip of the other for an instant, and then there was a shot!

As the smoke cleared away the young man was seen with his pistol pointed at the ceiling, while Jim Townley, with a look of amazement in his eyes, stood, as if waiting for the next movement of the dude.

"Get out of this! I give you your life," said the young man, coldly.

For a second Townley seemed uncertain what to do. His right hand stole instinctively toward the heavy revolver in his belt, but a gleam in the eye of the young man, and the slightest possible movement of his pistol-hand warned the desperado not to attempt any reprisals. One glowering look around the room, and then he sneaked out like a beaten cur.

As Jim Townley disappeared there was a general loosening of tongues. Everybody had something to say and everybody except the young man was thirsty.

"Dude, yer did well. I'm glad ez yer put that feller down. He's too fresh, and when he tried ter run things with you, you did ther right thing."

The young man, Arthur Grier (or as he was generally called in Hopeful Gulch, "Dude Grier") turned away as if the remarks were distasteful to him, and going over to a corner, in which something that appeared to be a bundle of old clothes, was crouched upon the floor, shook it into the semblance of a bleary-eyed old man, who, it was easily to be seen, was deeply under the influence of liquor.

"Whazzer mazzer?" grunted the creature. "Whar's Lucy?"

"Hyar dad. Hyar I am!"

A sweet girlish voice, and then from an adjoining room, seen through the open doorway to be fitted up rudely as a kitchen, a maiden of perhaps eighteen tripped lightly up to the old fellow, and tried to straighten his bent old hat upon his head, and to adjust his clothes generally.

"Let's go home, dad."

"All ri—"

"He was too far gone to fini h his words."

"Lucy, I'll help you," whispered Dude.

"Wal, yer needn't. I think yer hev too much ter do, er-interferin' with folks' business, anyhow."

"Why, Lucy!" remonstrated the young man, and there was a ring of such heartfelt sorrow in his tones that the girl looked up quickly, and spoke with something less than her former acerbity.

"Wal, what did yer do it fer?"

"How could I help it, Lucy? Do you know what he said?"

"Yes, I heerd him. An', what then? Who takes any notice uv Jim Townley? He said he wuz gwine ter marry me, an' that he didn't know but what I ought to feel honored 'cause he wuz gwine ter do it. Wasn't that it?"

"Yes, that was it. The wretch! I wonder why I didn't kill him," burst from the young man, tempestuously.

"I know why yer didn't do it. Yer hed too much sense. I wish yer hed hed jist er little more sense, an' let him alone altogether."

"Well, I spared his life."

"I dunno that that wuz er wise thing, after all," said Lucy, with queer inconsistency as the case presented itself to her in a new light. "He'll be er-layin' fer yer now."

"I shall be ready for him," announced Arthur Grier, touching the butt of his revolver significantly. "But, come, Lucy; let me see you and your father home."

The old man had fallen asleep, but a vigorous shaking at the hands of his daughter brought some life into him, and the young man led him, in a very wobbling and uncertain state, to the door, and thence into the air.

"Good-night, Bess!" cried the young girl, putting her head into the kitchen. "I'm goin' home."

"Good-night, Lucy! Whar's yer dad?"

"He's gone ahead with Dude. Say, Bess," added the girl softly, as she glanced around to make sure that none of the men in the place could hear her. "Did yer see how Dude backed down Jim Townley? Doesn't he do i tsplendid! I wouldn't t-l him, but, by gosh, I think he's pretty near er daisy now."

A stout, good-natured appearing young woman, some years older than Lucy, and bearing enough resemblance to Arch Morrow to show that she was related to him, stepped to the door of the kitchen, with a smile, which changed to a frown as she saw Mathew Clark leering at her.

"Good-night, Lucy! I shall knock that Mat Clark down with a poker some day, I know," she added, *sotto voce*.

Lucy Laurent laughed lightly, and ignoring the "good-nights" of several of the miners, joined Dude Grier and her father in the darkness outside.

Old Silas Laurent was in that peculiar state of intoxication which causes the victim to see a covert attempt to injure him in everything said and done in his presence. So now he set his back against the wall of the log shanty in which Arch Morrow carried on the business of his grocery, and defied Dude Grier to mortal combat.

"I'll do it wiz Winch'st'rs or wiz anyzing! M' name's Sil's Laur'n an' don' y' fgit it. Whoop!"

The old man wound up his defiance with the merest ghost of a howl, but it would have shaken him off his feet had not Dude Grier held him.

"Take y' han's ff me. I tell y' I don' wa' no man ter—"

At this juncture Lucy came out, and stopped the driveling of her father in her own energetic way, by giving him a shaking that knocked off his hat and made his teeth rattle like a bag of dried peas.

"Now, come on and git ter bed. I've had enough uv you fer one night. Dude, pick up his hat."

Although Lucy Laurent spoke imperiously, as her custom was, the young man detected a slight trembling in her tones, and he pitied her from the bottom of his heart, for he knew that she was ashamed of the drunken father who had become the butt of the camp through his dissolute habits.

He knew better than to let the girl gain any inkling of what was passing in his mind, however, so he only put old Silas's hat upon his head, and taking one of his arms while Lucy held the other, led him toward the cabin he and his daughter called home, high up on the mountain-side.

Silas may have still desired to fight a duel with Dude Grier, but he was not so drunk that he did not realize how unsafe it would be for him to talk about it in his daughter's presence. He stood thoroughly in awe of her, whether he was drunk or sober.

The saloon of Arch Morrow lay in a ravine at the foot of a mountain. It was the stage-road from Prescott to Gila Bend, and was fringed on either side with pines that grew almost in a forest on the side of the mountains, save where the miners, in their operations, had cut the trees away for more room.

It was very dark, for there was no moon, but all three knew the way perfectly—even Silas, finding his way instinctively, and stepping aside from big stones and stumps that strewed the path.

They turned off the road, after awhile, and crossing a swollen creek that was almost a boiling torrent after the heavy rains that had just ceased, by means of the trunk of a gigantic cottonwood that had fallen accidentally just where it was useful, made their way up the mountain.

Silas Laurent's shanty, although rough-looking from the outside, was well-built and larger than most of the houses of the miners of Hopeful Gulch. It was built of good sound timber, and contained four large rooms on the ground floor, with two above. Rude stairs had been fashioned in one corner, and the house was furnished with many of the comforts of a city home.

The walls were thick, and the two outer doors, one in front and the other behind, were made like those of a fortress, so that they could be secured by their big wooden bars, and actually resist a siege.

Times were wild in Southern Arizona a few years ago, and Silas Laurent was a cautious man when sober, and moreover had had experience on the outskirts of society during most of his life.

The house was on a ledge high up on the face of a perpendicular cliff. Between the back door and the rocky wall was a space of not more than four feet, while out at the front the house was built within two feet of the edge of the precipice, which descended perfectly straight for two hundred feet into the valley. Above the shanty the mountain arose some four thousand feet, almost straight, but with paths among the pines that grew in clumps here and there, that led circuitously to the top, provided one only knew the way.

Double doors were at the front of the shanty, which, when pushed outward together, and fastened by a bolt into the solid rocks, effectually kept intruders away, while allowing the inmates of the house to keep the doors open and thus enjoy all the light and air they desired. A porch over the front doorway prevented any one climbing over, so that the shanty was indeed thoroughly protected.

Although it was quite dark, Lucy had no difficulty in guiding her father to his home.

The three had arrived on a ledge some distance below and to the left of the house when Lucy coolly dismissed the young man, telling him that they were nearly home, and she could manage her father very well for the rest of the way.

"But, Lucy," began the young man, in remonstrative tones.

"Shut up and go home now, Dude. You hear what I say, don't you?" interrupted the girl, in her imperative way.

"Yes, but—"

"Git, then, and don't give me none uv yer back talk, I tell yer. Come, dad!"

Without deigning to notice young Grier further, she hauled her father around a corner, and by dint of coaxing and pushing, made fairly good time toward their shanty.

"She's a good girl, with all her untrained ways. I wonder whether she—"

He did not finish the sentence.

Something flashed before his eyes, and a heavy blow on his forehead stretched him at the feet of a man whom even in the gloom, he recognized as the Jim Townley whose life he had spared in Arch Morrow's saloon less than an hour before.

"Now, yer dude, I've got yer, hev I? Yer durned coward! Even when yer hed ther drop on er man yer wuz afraid ter shoot, warn't yer? Wal, yer kin bet yer boots Jim Townley ain't one uv them thar kind. He's out fer blood every time, an' don't yer fergit it."

As the fellow spoke, Dude Grier saw that he held his revolver ready for instant use, and that he would shoot without hesitation if the young man made any sign of resistance.

"Well, Jim, I don't know," answered Dude, as coolly as possible. "I gave you your life, and I should think you would be willing to call this square by letting me up now. We needn't be friends on that account, and we can settle our difficulty at some future time fair and upright, and man to man, if we think it necessary."

"We'll settle it right hyar," hissed Jim. "I've got yer, an' I'm goin' ter put yer out uv the way jist 'z I would a snake. You've tried to set the gal ag'in' me ez I'm goin' ter marry, cuss yer, and I don't allow no man ter do that, whether he's er dude or not."

"You scoundrel!" burst from the young man, as, unable to control himself longer, he sprung at the other's throat.

Like a flash, Townley leveled his revolver point-blank at the young man's head and pulled the trigger.

At the same instant a white hand, upon which flashed a large diamond and which was nearly half-covered by enormous white, well-starched cuffs, knocked the revolver up, while another hand, the counterpart of the first, diamond and all, seized the desperado by the throat and twisted him to the ground as easily as if he were an infant in the hands of a giant.

"Excuse me!" murmured a soft voice.

Dude Grier started back in surprise.

The owner of the hands was not a giant, by any means. He was a young, slightly built man about five feet eight inches in height. He had a pale, immobile face, upon each side of which light hair, very straight, was brushed from a parting in the center of the head. He was dressed in the extreme of fashion, with a short overcoat revealing the tails of a black frock-coat beneath it. His collar was abnormally high, and his silk necktie was gorgeous. A small Derby hat had fallen upon the ground in his struggle with the desperado, and his feet were seen to be incased in neat shoes that were hardly calculated to withstand the wear and tear of the rocks of Arizona. A pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses rested on his nose, where they had remained, in spite of the affray.

He was quite unexcited, however, standing over the prostrate Townley, with a revolver in each hand, ready to blow out the rascal's brains at the first sign of revolt.

"Who ther devil are you?" demanded Jim viciously.

"I beg your pardon! What did you ask?" asked the stranger, with the utmost politeness.

"What's your name?"

"My name? Oh, I am from Boston. I give instruction in aesthetics, and I am known as Professor Robert Roberts."

"Ugh!" grunted Townley. "A professor!" extreme disgust distorting his ugly countenance.

"I beg your pardon!"

Dude Grier had been looking at the elegant man from Boston as if he thought he had seen him before. Now he leaned forward, and whispered so that Townley could not hear:

"I recognize you, Roberts. I met you in Chicago two years ago, did I not?"

Without the slightest change of expression, The Professor replied in an earnest whisper, very unlike the affected drawl he had used before:

"Possibly. But, keep your own counsel for the present, my friend!"

"I will. But are you not—"

"Hush!" in a fierce undertone that compelled instant obedience.

CHAPTER II.

TWO FACES AT THE WINDOW.

"WAL, stranger, how long hev I got ter lay here?" growled Jim Townley. "Yer hev ther drop on me, so I s'pose I can't do nothing."

Professor Robert Roberts's immediate reply was a vigorous kick on the prostrate ruffian's ribs that fairly made them rattle.

"I beg your pardon?" interrogatively.

If looks could kill this careless little sport from Boston would have died before the glower of Jim Townley's eyes that moment. As it was, the scowl upon his face was replied to by another kick from the fashionable toothpick shoes that seemed to give great comfort to The Professor.

"Air yer goin' ter let me up?" inquired Townley again.

"Am I going to let you— Oh, I beg your pardon. Certainly! Get up, Mr. Townley!"

"Townley? You air makin' mighty free with my name, seems to me. Who told you my name wuz Townley?"

"Never mind. Get up, James."

The desperado obeyed in a hang-dog way peculiarly his own.

"Throw up your hands, please," added The Professor, in the softest tones.

"I'll be—"

"Throw up your hands!" repeated the stranger, this time in a voice of menace not to be misunderstood.

Up went Jim Townley's hands, while Dude Grier looked on wonderingly, and waited curiously for what was to follow.

"Now, Mr. Townley, I am going to dismiss you," resumed The Professor, in his gentle voice.

"But before you go I should like to warn you."

"Get on with yer warnin' then, an' cut it short. I'm tired uv listenin' ter all this hyar chinnin'," was Townley's sulky response.

The sport from Boston, still with the two pistols balanced in his hands, looked straight into Townley's eyes, as he said:

"Jim Townley, I met yo' in Chicago, at the house of a friend of mine, a banker named Smail. Do you know me, now?"

He took off his glasses, and drawing his mouth down so as to alter the expression of his face, smiled benevolently at the desperado.

The effect of this action was the make Townley's eyes open wide, his jaw to fall, and his hands to drop involuntarily to his side, as he gasped:

"Alive! Alive!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Is—is—it you—Boston Bob?"

"Yes, I guess it is. Now, go!"

The Professor replaced his glasses on his nose and handed one of the pistols—Townley's own, that he had snatched from him as he threw him down—to him, with a gracious bow.

The desperado took the revolver without a word and put it in his belt. He seemed to have no idea of using it. His whole being was apparently enveloped in astonishment and dread.

"Go!" repeated the man from Boston.

Townley walked slowly away, while The Professor put his own pistol in the side pocket of his light overcoat, and turned with a smile toward Dude Grier.

"When did you arrive, Roberts?" asked Dude.

"This evening. I got off the Prescott coach at Collins's Butte, some five miles north of here, and then walked quietly along the river and over the foot-hills to Hopeful Gulch. You see, I did not want to come with any particular flourish of trumpets. I wanted to look over the ground quietly, so that I could see where I was."

"But—but—I should think you would find it hard walking in those shoes. They look like the latest fad in dress shoes for city dudes."

"Not at all, my dear chappie—not at all! They are not bad-looking trotter-cases, because I never would wear an ugly shoe, if I could help it, but they are very comfortable, too. A well-made shoe is just the thing for Arizona, and I had them made to order in Denver by an old friend of mine who knows just what I want when I give an order and who has never disappointed me yet."

"Well, I'm glad to see you, anyhow," observed Dude. "You will come to my cabin for the night, won't you?"

The Professor shook the hand of the young man heartily as he said:

"You're a good fellow, Arthur Grier, and I guess I'll accept your invitation. I shall be around Hopeful Gulch for a little while yet—several weeks, probably, and I shall go down to Morrow's in the morning. But I want a little talk with you first. You do not ask me *why* I am here, by the way?"

Dude Grier smiled.

"I take it for granted that you have come to learn something about the manners and customs of miners roughing it in their eager search for gold and silver, so that you can tell the pupils of your class in aesthetics what to avoid."

The man from Boston, let out a hearty "haw-haw!" at this, and once more shaking hands with Grier, as if he were particularly amused, walked swiftly down the narrow path in the track of Jim Townley, with Grier at his heels.

Only for a few yards did they go down the path, however. Roberts, who seemed to know the place as well as his companion, turned off into the forest on the right before they had proceeded very far. After ten minutes' walk up and down the rough rocks, the two men at last found themselves before a small shanty standing upon the edge of an excavation that showed how busy had been the pick and shovel for months before. This was Dude Grier's "shebang."

He took a key from an inside pocket of his shirt and threw open the door.

"How does the claim pan out, friend Grier?" asked The Professor, casually, as he entered.

"Not very well. In fact, I get completely discouraged sometimes," answered the other, with a weary sigh, as he lighted a candle, and barred the door.

"Ah! Very likely," remarked The Professor.

"And you are in love, too, eh?"

The young man's face flushed and an angry gleam shone in his eye for a moment. But The Professor, who had seated himself upon a rude stool near the table, took no notice of his companion. He went on talking in a matter-of-fact way, as he laid a pocketbook on the table and took some papers from it:

"Lucy Laurent is a nice girl, Grier, and I do not blame you for being in love with her. Does she like you, pretty well?"

Dude Grier clinched his fists impatiently, and strode up and down the little room, looking occasionally at his cool, effeminate-appearing companion as if he would like to shake him out of his high collar and preposterous light overcoat, but he did not speak.

"You need not tell me if you don't want to, you know, Arthur," went on The Professor, quietly, as, selecting one large paper from his pocketbook, he spread it out upon the table and looked at it attentively by the dim light of the guttering candle.

Dude Grier stopped in his hurried walk and paused in front of the quiet figure at the table.

"Why, you know, I—I—" he stammered, and then something in his throat seemed to choke him, for he stopped and threw out his arms as if in a desperate effort to relieve himself.

The man from Boston arose, and placing his two hands on the young man's shoulders—and the hands were very white and small—looked him full in the eyes for at least half a minute before he said, speaking slowly and gravely:

"Arthur Grier, you know who Boston Bob is. You know that I do not ask questions for nothing, and you should know that after that night in Chicago, two years ago, I am your friend."

"Yes, I believe it, Roberts."

"I am glad of it, Grier. You saved my life that night. If you had not come around that corner just when a certain man was about to end my career with a sand-bag, I should not be here now to tell you that Boston Bob never forgets a friend—or an enemy."

"I did only what any man would have done," answered Dude Grier. "Besides, you saved my life to night."

"My obligation is just as great, notwithstanding. However, let that pass, now, Arthur. You are in love with Lucy, the daughter of old Silas Laurent. That I know. If you were half as bold in love as you are in a row with men, you would have made her confess that she liked you long before this. I would have done it, I know."

There was a smile on the face of The Professor that told Arthur Grier Professor Roberts did not lack personal vanity, but he made no remark, as the other went on:

"You shall have that girl!"

"What—what—do you mean?"

"Never mind. I have said that you shall have Lucy Laurent for your bride within a reasonable time, and so you shall."

"But—"

"But me no buts, I prithee. Ahem! Shakespeare! At least I believe it is. It sounds like him anyhow. I say that you shall have Lucy Laurent."

"On what conditions?"

"On condition that you act in the manly fashion that you have hitherto. That is all. You may have to fight for her—"

"Fight for her? I'll die for her!" burst out Dude Grier, passionately.

"You needn't die for her. The girl does not want a dead husband," responded The Professor.

"But, that is enough. I understand your feeling, I think, although I never was really in love myself. A little flirtation in the moonlight, or a few whispered nothings in the pauses of a waltz in a brilliant ball-room are all that I—"

"Yes, yes," broke in young Grier, impatiently. "But what am I to do?"

The Professor was perhaps annoyed for the moment at the reminiscences being broken in upon so rudely, but one glance at his eager companion brought him to himself.

Seating himself upon his stool, he placed his hand on the paper he had spread upon the table and told Grier to look at it.

"It looks like a map," Duke remarked.

"It is a map."

"Of what?"

"Of a fortune for the man who can find his right to it."

"What does it all mean? And what has this map to do with Lucy Laurent?"

"I will explain: This is a map of the richest gold deposit in Southern Arizona. The place is within a radius of twenty miles from where we stand to-night, and it is the entire property of Lucy Laurent. Now, do you begin to understand?"

"Partly only."

"Ah!"

The Professor took from one of his pockets a delicately embroidered velvet cigar case, and lighting a fragrant Havana after offering the case in vain to Duke—puffed away in a contented fashion, as he looked at his companion through a haze of blue smoke. He was evidently enjoying the situation very much, only the cigar being necessary to render his satisfaction complete.

"I hold a clew to the situation of this property, but there are two other persons also who each hold one."

"Well?"

Arthur Grier was leaning over the table now, earnestly scrutinizing the map that lay before The Professor.

"These two persons are—"

"Yes—yes. Who?"

"Not so fast, friend Grier. You disturb me when you hurry in that way. You make me smoke fast, and that is the ruin of a real Havana."

"I am sorry, but, who are these people that hold the other clews? And what have they to do with it! You know where it is, I suppose?"

"No, I do not. You see, there are three scraps of paper containing the directions as to the whereabouts of the gold ledge or pocket. None of the scraps are of any use without the other two. I have one of these scraps; Silas Laurent has another, and—"

"And who has the other?" interrupted Grier, eagerly.

"That I do not know, and I expect you to help me find out."

"I am with you, heart and soul, Roberts!"

"Yes, of course you are. I knew you would be. Give Lucy Laurent her fortune, and I think you can be sure of her for a bride."

"I do not seek any reward. All I want is to make her rich and happy, whether she is mine or not."

"Ah, yes, of course!" assented The Professor, coldly. "That is the way lovers always talk. I think I really must fall in love myself, some time, for the sake of experiencing the unselfish feeling."

"Now, what is the first thing to be done?"

"Nothing, to-night. You need sleep, and so do I. You seem to keep terrible hours in Hopeful Gulch. I will tell you more about our plans in the morning. Shall you be at work to-morrow?"

"No work now. I am going to devote my time and attention to the interests of Lucy Laurent until she is in possession of her own," answered Grier, as he arranged his own cot-bed for The Professor, and made up a couch for himself on the table with the spare blankets.

Professor Roberts walked up and down the room, puffing his Havana, with the map folded up and hidden away in his pocketbook, but occasionally bestowing a glance of approval from his light-blue eyes upon the young man.

They were a strange pair. The young man from Boston, with his extravagant costume, taken from the last fashion plate, and his general appearance that of a very feeble member of the "cane-and-toothpick brigade," that are the laughing stock of sensible men in all our cities, but with muscles of steel concealed by his soft, white skin, and an iron will under his easy-going manner. Then Dude Grier, with his aristocratic features, his curling hair and unmistakable air of gentility, dressed as a miner, and evidently used to the laborious work of the mines.

What romance was there behind these two young men, and what adventures had fate in store for them? We shall see.

Ab! What are these two faces at the little window, so high up in the wall, that Arthur Grier had forgotten to close the shutter?

One of them we recognize at once as that of

Jim Townley. That square face, covered with bushy beard, those deep-set eyes, could belong to but one man.

But the other? It is swarthy, shaded by long, black hair that descends on each side of the face, and is pushed back behind the ears, in which large gold rings shine in the candlelight. There are deep-set black eyes that look green sometimes. There's a black mustache, waxed and standing out stiff and straight above the thin, cruel lips, which are separated enough to show two rows of savage yellow teeth. Such is the face that appears by the side of Jim Townley's at the little window.

"Caramba! What he do here? I know him!"

"Aha! Yer do, eh, Guerillo? Wal, what now?"

"He have the papier zat makes me and you reech, eh? Caramba!"

"Wal?"

"Dis I gif him," hissed the other, drawing a bowie-knife from his belt and swinging it in the air, as if he would try and stab the unconscious Professor, comfortably smoking his cigar from the window. "Dis. I moost haf zat papier—I vill haf it!" fiercely.

"Good, Guerillo! A Mexican for business," grunted Townley. "You settle The Professor, and I'll—"

"V'at for you call him Ze Professor, eh?"

"That's what I heard him called in Chicago. Professor Roberts."

"Haf you not heard his other name?"

"What is it?"

"Zey calls him"—the Mexican looked fearfully around him, as if he dreaded that what he was going to say might bring swift vengeance upon him, then he hissed the words: "Zey calls him *Boston Bob, the Holy Terror!*"

As he uttered the name, The Professor removed the stump of his cigar from his lips, and looked up straight into Guerillo's eyes.

CHAPTER III.

A COWARDLY MURDER.

WHEN Jim Townley was so summarily dismissed from the presence of The Professor on the mountain-side, he walked on, hardly realizing that he had been baffled in his vengeance upon Dude Grier by a most unexpected interposition.

He had recognized in the extravagantly dressed Bostonian a detective with whom he had had a tussle in Chicago, two years before, on account of a highway robbery that had been prevented by the activity of the officer, and whom he had waylaid after and would have killed but for the interposition of a young man, who had appeared in the nick of time and snatched the murderous sand-bag from the assassin.

"Cuss him!" added Townley, when his reflections reached this point. "If I ever meet him again, I will make him wish he hadn't been in Chicago that night."

Townley walked fast as his thoughts galloped along, for he knew that the handsome young fellow they called Dude Grier had won the heart of Lucy Laurent, and that Jim Townley had no more chance of winning her than if she had been a resident of one of the stars shining above his head at that moment.

"I'll be even with him yet, somehow. An' that sport from Chicago, or Boston, or whatever it is, I'll fix him, too, afore I've done with him, although he does get the better uv me now. Dunno how it wuz he made me take water that time. But I won't do it ag'in, I bet!"

Walking on so quickly, he soon found himself at Arch Morrow's place.

The revelry that had been temporarily interrupted by his fracas with Dude Grier was in full swing now, louder than when we last saw the inside of the place.

Arch Morrow himself sat in a chair before the door leading into the kitchen, and kept a wary eye on his customers. He had just announced that he would not sell any more liquor that night, and that he was going to close up in exactly fifteen minutes. A game of poker was going on at a table near him, and the four players were hurriedly finishing the hand so that all the winnings and losings could be adjusted in time. They knew that when Arch Morrow said he would close at a certain time he would do it, at whatever inconvenience and cost to his patrons. His will was law in his own house, and almost so throughout the whole of Hopeful Gulch.

Two of the poker-players were grotesquely alike in some respects, although widely different in others. They were Guerillo the Mexican and Mat Clark.

Both had lank hair, and both were of the thin, wiry order of architecture. But the deadly purpose in the swarthy countenance of the Mexican was sustained by an expression of fierce courage, while in Mat Clark's yellow face mean-spirited cowardice held its place in spite of him.

"Guerillo!" whispered Jim, as he passed the players, bending over the Mexican for an instant as if by accident.

"Ugh!" grunted Guerillo, throwing down his cards and gathering up the stakes.

"Well, I'll be durned, Guerillo. You've got 'em again," growled Clark, as he arose from the table.

"Zat ees v'at I play for! Caramba! You zink I plays for fun?"

"Come, get out uv this; I want ter lock up ther house," broke in Arch Morrow, as he stood up and pointed toward the door.

There was no hesitation about obeying him, and in less than five minutes the only persons in the place were the proprietor, Townley, Guerillo and Clark.

Morrow fastened the door securely, and then facing around to the three men with him, grunted:

"Wal?"

"Hold on, Arch! Whar's Bess?" asked Jim Townley, looking cautiously around him.

"Whar should she be? She is in bed and asleep, uv course. Thet's her room, and I heerd her lock the door two hours ago," replied Morrow, pointing to a door by the side of that belonging to the kitchen.

"Sure she ain't listening, Arch?" put in Mat Clark, softly.

"Shut up, yer white-livered skunk. D'ye think every one is er sneak ez well ez yerself? I'd break her jaw ef I caught her listenin', an' she knows it."

Arch Morrow was rather inconsistent in his remarks, but his companions were not disposed to criticise him. He could say what he liked in his own house. Besides, he had answered them that his daughter was not eaves-dropping, and that was the main point after all.

"Wal, now, Arch, it is sart'in somethin' bezer to be done right away. Thet thar Dude hez ther gal pretty safe, or he thinks he hez. You saw how he bluffed me ter-night about her. Now, I want ter marry ther gal, an' I mean ter do et. Then we kin find out 'bout this hyar property she owns, an' when we strike ther pay streak, why—"

"I dunno 'bout that," said Morrow. "I think we hed better find ther property first, an' let you marry the gal arterwards."

"Yes, zat is ze idea," agreed Guerillo.

"Wal, I don't care, I'll 'tend ter my own courtin' ef you fellers will git ther papers we want."

"We know whar they are, don't we?" whined Mat. "We know old man Laurent hez one, Arch Morrow hez another, and the other is—whar Guerillo knows."

"Yes, I know, but I haf to go to Chicago for it."

"Thet's all right. When will you go?" asked Morrow.

"V'en you like. I not care."

"To-morrow, then."

"All right, I go."

"Good-night, then! I'm going to bed. Mat, go to yer room, an' you two fellers jes' git out."

Thus summarily breaking up the meeting, Arch Morrow watched Mat Clark ascending a ladder in one corner that led to an upper chamber of very rude appearance and pushed the Mexican and Jim Townley through the outer door, as he said good-night.

As soon as the two men had disappeared, and Mat Clark had shut down the trap-door over the small square opening that led to his bedroom, Arch Morrow walked across the room to the pile of flour sacks that stood in one corner and looked behind them, as if to make sure that there was no one hidden there. Then he searched the room in every other direction, with a suspicious air rather at variance with his usual bullying style.

"Ef I caught any one hyar, I'd wring his neck, but I'd rather not find him all ther same. Thar's no sense nor use in killin' er man ef yer kin avoid it."

Arch Morrow smiled grimly at this little bit of philosophy of his own, and after listening for a moment at his daughter's room, and satisfying himself that she was, indeed, asleep, he stood still as if making up his mind what he should do next.

"I don't s'pose thar's any danger from that feller," he mused, looking at the trap-door at the top of the ladder, but I should like to make sure."

He crept softly up the ladder, and tried to raise the trap-door.

It was immovable—fastened on the other side.

"'Um! I might have known it. Wal, so long ez he is quiet I won't disturb him. He can't interfere with me 'ithout comin' down, an' he can't see me 'ithout openin' ther trap."

He crept down the stairs again, and, listening for another few moments, took the candle from the table where it had been flaring and blinking, knelt down behind the bar, and pulled up a certain loose board in one corner behind a heavy iron pot full of spare beer glasses.

It took him some time to move the pot enough to give him access to the loose board, but he did not seem to mind that. At last he got the board up, revealing a very small space nearly filled with sawdust. He burrowed in this sawdust and then took from it a small key, which he turned over and over in his hands, and looked at affectionately.

"Thar you air, my beauty! Safe an' sound! You're ther key to a fortune, and old Arch Morrow is er goin' ter hev it, sure."

He walked across the room with the key in his hand, shaking his head in his enjoyment of his own muttered words, utterly oblivious of

the fact that a pair of sharp eyes were watching him with a hungry gleam that boded no good for him if their owner had the power to carry out the evil expressed in them.

The eyes were those of Mat Clark. He was lying flat upon the floor of the dark loft in which he was supposed to be asleep, looking through a good-sized hole that he had bored in the wooden flooring, that was at the same time the ceiling of the room below. The hole had been made by Mr. Clark when he first took possession of the room, months ago, and he had often used it in about the same way as to-night.

"Cuss yer, yer old varmint! I'll find out ter-night jiss whar yer keep that thar paper. I know yer would like ter shut me out uv ther deal altogether ef yer could. But yer can't do it, all ther same, an' don't yer forget it."

There was a world of malice in the tones of Mat Clark's voice as he hissed these words through his closed teeth.

Arch Morrow, with the key in his hand, had gone to a large, rough box which was apparently full of soap. Looking around him once more, he began to remove the soap, piece by piece, until the box was half-empty. Then there was revealed a small iron chest, not more than a foot square, which was firmly clamped to the bottom of the soap box.

Mat Clark's deep-set eyes fairly blazed as he saw the iron chest from his loft.

Morrow solaced himself with a long look at the top of the chest, and then went on hastily to remove more of the soap, so that he could get at the lock with his key. In another moment the lid of the chest was raised, showing a number of legal-looking documents, carefully folded, and several bags that Mat Clark knew at a glance contained gold-dust.

"Ther robber!" he muttered.

The saloon-keeper pushed the bags of dust aside carelessly. He was searching for something much more valuable.

He soon found it, in the shape of a piece of dirty yellow paper, folded small and tied up tightly with a piece of strong cord.

With fingers trembling with eagerness, he untied the string, and spread the paper open, upon the counter. He drew the candle close to him, and pored closely over the paper. It was a map, with words and figures here and there.

"Ah! When I git ther other two, I shall hev it safe enough! An' I'll hev ther other two ez soon ez thet thar Greaser gits back from Chicago. An' they think ez I'll divide up with 'em, eh? Yes, I will! I'm likely ter do that! Arch Morrow is jist thet sort uv man, ain't he?"

He chuckled aloud at the bare idea of his giving up to any one else anything he could retain for himself, and then, bending more closely over the paper, tried to work out the problem it contained without the aid of the other two papers that were to make the whole matter plain.

"It ain't no use, I guess. I'll hev ter take ther help uv them other fellers, after all. Wal, let 'em help me. I guess I kin fix things up with them, arterwards."

He drew a small stool up to the counter, and seated himself that he might more comfortably enjoy his examination of his precious paper.

He soon became absorbed in his occupation. With his elbows on the counter and his head resting upon his hands, he followed the lines on the map with his eyes, and tried to understand the relation of the figures and words to different parts of the diagram.

He was oblivious to everything save the paper that was to lead him to a fortune.

And yet, he was not alone in the room.

The trap-door at the top of the stairs had opened gently, and Mat Clark's sallow face had appeared in the opening. Slowly he came down the stairs, step by step, a knife in his right hand.

He reached the bottom of the ladder and paused, apparently to screw up his courage for the dastardly deed he had determined to commit if he could.

Arch Morrow, with his elbows on the counter and the paper before his eyes had no suspicion of the treacherous foe behind him.

Well did Mat Clark know now that a false step or the slightest noise would mean death to him. Arch Morrow would crush him like a worm and with as little compunction. So he took particular care not to make his presence known.

Holding his breath, and walking on tiptoe, Clark stole nearer and nearer to the unconscious saloon-keeper.

At last he stood close behind his intended victim, bending over him with knife upraised, while his greedy eyes sought the precious map that lay before him.

For an instant he waited, as if to gather up his coward's purpose. Then, with a swift movement, he swung the knife around and sunk it deeply in the chest of his victim.

Morrow dropped like a log, without even a groan. The knife had reached his heart, and he had died instantaneously.

Mat Clark's first act now was to secure the precious paper, which he folded and tied up as it had been before. Then he looked longingly at the bags of gold-dust, but he knew it would not be safe to touch them.

It was his purpose to make the death of Arch Morrow seem like suicide, and a robbery of the gold dust would fasten the crime upon him at once. As for the paper, no one knew anything about it, and it was safe for him to take that, so long as he kept it hidden away in his pocket.

The knife that he had used for the murder was the property of Morrow, which Clark had dexterously stolen from its owner's belt while he was dismissing Guerillo and Jim Townley. Mat Clark had prepared himself, for he had made up his mind that it might be necessary to use it during the night, if he got a chance.

Although Mat Clark was a coward where living man was concerned, he did not fear a corpse. So he placed the knife in the right hand of the dead man, and arranged him so that he might have stabbed himself and fallen back upon the floor.

"Now, I'll go to bed!" muttered Clark, turning away coolly.

The next moment he felt himself clutched by the throat, and Bess Morrow, her eyes blazing with horror and excitement, tried to force him to the ground as she gasped:

"My poor father!"

CHAPTER IV.

JIM TOWNEY'S CHARMED LIFE.

It was the morning after the events narrated in the preceding chapters. Lucy Laurent had just arisen from her bed in one of the upper rooms and was bustling about to get breakfast for her father.

She had thrown open the double doors in front of the house, and fastened them so that she had a little courtyard from which she could admire the view of forest, mountain and valley for a score of miles in the clear morning air, without fear of intrusion.

The front rooms were furnished like parlors and in one of them a fairly good piano took up at least half the space. In one of the back rooms was a kitchen stove and a table spread with a white cloth for breakfast, while in the other old Silas Laurent lay fast asleep on a narrow bed made up on the lid of a huge dark-colored wooden chest. This was always his bed. He could have had a more comfortable one had he desired it, but he preferred the chest, with its iron bands and bolts, and he declared that he could not get a wink of sleep upon anything else. There were those that said the chest contained gold-dust in large quantities and certificates in paying mines to a fabulous amount. But old Silas never said anything about it. He only grinned when any of these remarks reached his ears, and for anything his face told he might have a million dollars' worth of riches in the chest or nothing at all.

Lucy had the coffee ready and had put a good-sized piece of corned beef, in company with some hot rolls, on the table, without disturbing her father. Now, however, she decided that it was time for him to arise.

"Git up, dad! Git up! I want yer ter do a little work, ter-day. You loafed around enough yesterday, I should think," cried Lucy, sharply, as she shook her father by the shoulder.

"All right, Lucy! all right! Yer needn't ter shake me ter bits, I should think," growled her father.

Lucy did not condescend to reply. She left him and busied herself in sweeping out the parlors until there was not a suspicion of dust in them.

Silas, grumbling about being disturbed so early, arose and dressed himself, and went in to his breakfast, which Lucy served out to him, in slaps and dabs as she lectured him upon his drinking habits in general and his excesses of the night before in particular.

He knew better than to complain, so he accepted the situation, eating his breakfast with becoming humility and then picking up his tools, made his way up one of the paths in the mountain toward the rim, which lying partly in a hollow, but many hundred feet above the plain, was about as unpromising as could well be conceived. There was not a man in Hopeful Gulch that had not expressed his wonder at old Silas picking and pounding away week after week, with little or no results, and the general impression was that the old man had consumed so much of the deadly liquor retailed by Arch Morrow that he had lost his senses.

Silas, as his habit was, grinned and said nothing.

"Mornin', Lucy! Hope ez yer slept well last night."

It was Jim Townley's voice, and Jim Townley's face appeared at one of the small window openings at the back of the house in front of the rocky cliff. Jim was trying to put on a propitiatory grin, but he made indifferent work of it, and Lucy thought she had never seen his deep-set eyes wear a more evil expression nor his coarse features look more repulsive.

"What d'ye want, Jim Townley?" she asked, rather ungraciously, as she poured some hot water from a kettle upon the cups and dishes she was washing.

"Only jist called ter see how you wuz. Thar's nothin' wrong in that, I s'pose?"

"Dunno whether thar is or not. It all depends," snapped the girl.

"You're hard on me."

"Guess so."

"Why air yer?" questioned Jim, as he moved from the window to the open doorway, and stood leaning against the door-post as if prepared for a long talk.

"What does it matter ter you what I say or do? I ain't nothin' ter you."

"But, Lucy, you know ez I want yer ter be somethin' ter me, and—"

Lucy turned away from the bowl in which she was was washing the dishes, and resting her hands upon her hips, faced Jim Townley defiantly.

"Now, look hyar," she began, with blazing eyes. "I've heerd ez you hev said you hez er notion ter me, an' you think ez how I might be brought ter let you talk ter me 'bout love."

"Wal, Lucy, I—"

"Shut your mouth till I'm through!"

"All right! Drive ahead."

"Wal, I— Durn yer pictur, I forgit whar I wuz now— Oh, yes, I remember, I wuz a-goin' ter say that ef yer hev hed any sich notion ez that yer kin drop it right hyar. I wouldn't let yer come nigh enough even ter touch me fer er great deal. So yer kin easily figure out what chance yer hev uv me ever lettin' yer talk ter me 'bout love."

The desperado's face worked with fury like that of a raving maniac, but he said not a word. He was actually in such a rage that he could not speak.

Lucy calmly went on washing her dishes as if there were no Jim Townley or any one else near her. She burst out into a little snatch of a song, in a sweet clear voice that would have told a musician, had he been there to hear it, that proper cultivation would make it almost phenomenal.

But Jim Townley cared nothing for music and knew less. The girl's voice, singing happily and carelessly, maddened him.

"By Heaven! you shall listen ter me," he hissed at last. "I'll not be made a fool uv by any gal."

He came forward as he spoke, with the evident intention of seizing Lucy by the wrist.

The girl was too quick for him. Divining his purpose at once, she picked up the large iron kettle that stood upon the stove beside her, and before he could retreat had poured some of the hot water over his hand. The water was not boiling, but it was hot enough to make Mr. Townley start back with a combined howl of pain and oath of rage.

"Yer wild-cat! I'd—"

"V'at vas ze mattare, Jeems?" interrupted another voice, and Lucy could not help a shiver as the swarthy face and waxed mustache of Guerillo the Mexican appeared at the window.

Townley did not answer, but he sprung at the girl, and snatching the kettle from her hand, threw it on the floor, where it speedily deluged the place with water and destroyed the ordinary neatness of the kitchen at one swoop. Then he seized her around the waist, and dragged her toward the door, holding one of his large hands over her mouth the while.

"Zat vas goot! Gif her to me!"

The Mexican had reached the door, and as Jim Townley brought Lucy out, he seized her, and taking off the red scarf he always wore about his waist, tied her hands tightly behind her.

"What air yer goin' ter do with me, Townley? Don't yer know that this will hang yer ter one uv those trees down in the hollow, jist ez sure ez ef ther rope wuz around yer neck?"

"Oh, I dunno," returned Jim, with a coarse laugh.

"V'at vas ze use of talking?" broke in Guerillo. "Git v'at you vants dere, Jeem, an' I take her avay."

He dragged the girl up one of the paths in the direction her father had taken not half an hour before, but turned off to the right, when they had walked two or three hundred yards, and led her into the depths of a clump of pines where the broad daylight was quickly turned into the gloom of evening.

In the mean time, Townley, who had evidently come prepared for certain operations, dropped the bedding from the big iron-bound chest, and essayed to open it.

As he expected, it was securely fastened, with three heavy padlocks, each attached to an iron band that seemed to pass completely around the box.

"Ther old fox knows enough ter take care uv what he hez," muttered the desperado, as he looked about for something with which he could break open the chest.

A pickax in one corner of the room caught his eye, and was soon employed upon the padlocks. It broke them off one after another, and in less than five minutes he had the satisfaction of lifting the lid off the box, and finding its contents at his disposal.

"Ther old rascal! Whar did he get all these, I wonder?" was the observation that broke from Jim Townley as he gazed upon what the box contained.

No money, so far as he could see at first glance. No bags of gold-dust. No certificates of mining shares. And yet the box was nearly full of valuables.

What were they?

Simply a collection of weapons—daggers, bowie-knives, cutlasses, heavy sabers, revolvers and rifles of all styles, from the smoothbore of fifty years ago to the Winchester repeater of today, and from the deadly stiletto of the Italian to the equally, if not more, dangerous bowie of the desperado of the West.

All the weapons were of the finest manufacture, and Jim saw that many of them, especially those of foreign appearance, were richly studded with jewels, and gilded thickly wherever gold could be applied.

"Thousands uv dollars right thar, in them guns an' knives, sure ez I'm alive. Whar ther deuce did he git 'em?"

Jim did not waste much time in speculation. He saw that the things in the trunk, or chest, were valuable. That was enough for him.

"Dunno how I kin carry 'em all away. An' yit I'm bound ter hev 'em all," he muttered, as he stuck jeweled knives and queer pistols, blazing with precious stones, all over their butts, in his belt. "These hyar things air so heavy. An' yit I kin only take 'em away as they air. Ef I wuz ter stop an' take all ther stones off 'em, I'd be here all day."

He looked down at the weapons he had placed in his belt, and from them to what remained in the chest. He saw that he could not carry all the contents of the chest in less than half a dozen loads. He must have help, or he must spend much more time in despoiling old Silas Laurent of his possessions than might be safe.

Suddenly he seemed to make up his mind what to do. He gathered up in his arms all the rifles and heavier weapons that he could carry, and ran up the mountain-path into the clump of pines into which Guerillo had dragged Lucy.

"Gone on ter ther ranch, I s'pose. Wal, all right. I'll follow 'em," muttered Townley.

Incumbered as he was with his load of guns and knives, he ran easily along the path among the trees, until he reached a certain spot, by the side of a great tree that had been blown down by the wind, or struck by lightning, in some long-past storm.

The tree was a gigantic pine, and it had fallen across a chasm, the depths of which no eye could penetrate. It was a great rift—a crack that seemed to have been formed actually by the mountain falling asunder, to make a death-trap for the unwary.

Cautiously Jim Townley walked along the tree-trunk, with his guns and other things hugged to him. He reached the middle of the chasm, and then—he slipped and disappeared!

He had gone from the tree-trunk that alone stood between him and thousands of feet of vacancy below, and not a sign of him remained.

Perhaps had any one been there he might have listened to hear the helpless body bumping against the rocky walls, or tearing through such fugitive bushes as there might be here and there in the mighty cleft!

But, there was no one there, so far as could be seen, and whatever had become of Jim Townley, there was no one in the neighborhood to remark.

Although the spot was not so very far from the other cabins of Hopeful Gulch, it was out of the beaten track, and no one was likely to go in that direction. It was said among the men who congregated in Arch Morrow's store of an evening, that the ghost of a boy who had been foully murdered by his partner, for his share of gold-dust, some five years ago, could be seen walking among the pines on certain nights in the year, and that he had a habit of clutching with one of his clammy hands the wrist of any venturesome mortal that happened to intrude upon his haunts, while pointing to an awful gash in his throat with the other.

This story, whether true or false, was quite enough to keep the average Arizona miner away from the thick clump of pines, and especially from the neighborhood of the big fallen tree, for it was said that the boy had been thrown down that chasm after being killed, and that his ghost always emerged from it to ramble about the forest.

Jim Townley was not superstitious, evidently, for he had walked boldly across the log until he slipped from it, and there had been no sign of apprehension on his face up to the moment of his disappearance.

But—what is this?

Can it be possible that there is something uncanny about this clump of trees, and that the supernatural does prevail over the forces of every day life?

Although Jim Townley had slipped off the log to go headlong thousands of feet, and be crushed out of all semblance of humanity in the awful and mysterious depths, he is quietly stepping up out of space and standing upon the prostrate tree again without any marks of injury upon him and smiling contentedly.

And Guerillo, the Mexican, is standing beside him.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN FROM BOSTON WAKES UP.
WE must return to Dude Grier and Professor Robert Roberts from Boston.

We left him calmly looking into the eyes of Guerillo, the Mexican, who, with Jim Townley, was watching him from the window of Dude Grier's cabin, while the latter was making up the beds for his guest and himself.

Until the man Guerillo had called the Holy Terror raised his eyes, the Mexican seemed to be firm in his intention to attack him. But, that cool, nonchalant glance, in which idle curiosity was blended with an amused enjoyment of the Mexican's discomfiture, was enough to upset any plans Guerillo may have had in his mind.

The Terror was master of the situation and he knew it as well as did the two trembling ruffians at the little window so far above his head.

"Dude," said The Professor, as he allowed a thin column of blue smoke to curl daintily from his lips, "you should close your shutters at night."

Dude Grier, busy with the blankets he was arranging upon the cot-bed, did not look up from his work, as he responded with a careless: "Oh, I don't know. Guess it doesn't make much difference. However, as it happens, I always do close them."

"Not always, I think, Dude."

"No?"

Dude Grier uttered the monosyllable so carelessly, that it could hardly be called a question. He was busy, and he only wondered in a vague way whether The Professor was not talking idly for the mere sake of saying something, when—

Bang!

The report of a revolver in the small room, all closed as it was, was almost deafening.

"What is it, Roberts?"

Dude Grier's silver-mounted six-shooter was in his hand, ready for use, although for the moment he could not tell in which direction the danger lay, if there was any.

"What is it?" he repeated, excitedly.

"Nothing particular, Dude. But I have put a hole through that little window of yours up there."

The Professor was sitting in a low rocking-chair that was Dude Grier's one luxurious weakness when tired after a hard day's work with pick and shovel. On The Professor's knee lay his hand grasping a still smoking revolver, while The Professor's pale blue eyes were fixed languidly upon the little window, at which the faces of Guerillo the Mexican and Jim Townley were no longer visible.

Dude rushed to the door and had lifted the bar half-way from its sockets on each side when the white sinewy hand of The Professor closed upon his wrist, as the languid accents of the same gentleman sounded a warning in his ear:

"Don't do that. Dangerous!"

"Why?"

"You know Jim Townley and a rascally Greaser called Guerillo?"

"You know I do."

"Well, they are outside!"

"Outside! Let me open that door!" cried Dude, passionately, as he made another attempt to remove the ponderous wooden bar, but the man from Boston pushed him away with a quiet but irresistible action.

"No. Let them get away this time. They will not linger longer than they can help. If you were to open the door now they would have a very pretty mark at you standing in silhouette with the light behind you, and I might have the job of avenging your murder instead of helping the girl you love to recover her fortune."

"I am not afraid of them."

"Of course you are not; my dear Arthur, I know that. But, discretion is very often the better part of valor, especially in the sparsely inhabited regions of southern Arizona."

"What does it all mean? Why did you fire that shot?" demanded Dude Grier, who could not quite understand what had taken place, and who was becoming more and more mystified by The Professor's languid but determined opposition to his going out.

"Just this, Arthur. I saw the two rascals at that window and I sent a bullet between their two faces just to warn them away. I do not like the privacy of my friends disturbed by the presence of such ugly scoundrels. If you had seen how suddenly they disappeared when I sent the shot you would have laughed, I am sure. It was the most ridiculous thing I ever saw."

Robert leaned back in his chair, to which he had already returned, and laughed, with a heartiness that bespoke his own keen enjoyment of the situation.

"Listen!" said Grier, suddenly. "I thought I heard something outside the door."

Both listened intently for at least a minute, but not a sound, save the soothng of the night wind through the pines that grew thickly around the cabin disturbed the stillness.

"Oh, they are gone," concluded Bob, as he laid the stump of his cigar upon the table, and walked up and down the room to prepare himself for rest.

The confidence of the meek-looking Professor was infectious. Dude Grier knew that if he did not consider everything safe, he would not be

thinking about going to sleep, and the young man was content to follow his companion's lead without question.

The Holy Terror Guerillo had called this pale-faced, blue-eyed, gentle-looking fellow, with his ultra-fashionable coats and trowsers and toothpick shoes. The Mexican could have added, too, that the Terror was so-called because he was one of the most renowned detectives in the West, and that he had won his sobriquet in Chicago by the easy way in which he had upset some of the best-laid schemes of crooks and embezzlers in that city, and had on one occasion captured single-handed two desperadoes who had set the whole police force at defiance for weeks.

Boston Bob had earned his title, and Guerillo knew that he was prepared to sustain his right to it in Southern Arizona as well as anywhere else.

Arthur Grier was prepared to trust the detective, so he did not ask any more questions about the two men who had been seen at the window. He contented himself with securing it by means of hinged wooden shutter and stout bolt, and then pointing to the couch, thus silently invited The Professor to retire.

The Professor took off his overcoat and brushed it carefully with a small whisk-brush that folded conveniently so that it could be carried in his pocket. Then he removed his under coat and vest and brushed them too, arranging them neatly on the rocking-chair by the side of his couch.

Very gorgeous looked the detective in his fine white shirt and embroidered silk suspenders, and Grier who had thrown off his things and stretched himself upon the improvised bed on the table laughed with intense amusement as he saw that his companion had retained his gold eyeglasses on his nose, and was amiably looking through them at the pocketbook containing the precious paper, which he was transferring from his coat pocket to the safer position under his pillow.

Five minutes later both men were sound asleep.

Arthur Grier had lived long enough upon the outskirts of civilization to know the importance of being always prepared for a foe, either open or secret. His silver-mounted six-shooters lay under his pillow, and as he slept his hand rested carelessly upon the butt of one of his weapons.

As for the detective his life had been one of restless adventure and constant peril, and he never trusted any one, especially when in a place in which the law of might was likely to be more regarded than that of right. So the fresh-faced, delicate-looking young man, with the light hair, lay in his cot with his weapons ready to his hand, while his white eyelashes seemed to lie very lightly upon his cheek, as if a whisper would wake him.

For perhaps half an hour the two men lay and slumbered heavily. Both were unusually fatigued. The detective had had a long ride, which, with his five-mile walk afterward, in his light, toothpick shoes, had made even his iron muscles ache to some extent, although he laughed at the very idea of being tired. Arthur Grier had worked hard on his claim all day, and had then, as we know, been through some rather exciting experiences in Arch Morrow's place, as well as in the mountains, and he was more than usually fatigued, too.

So they lay and slept. Every moment plunged them deeper into the sweet oblivion, and the scene in the hut was as peaceful as if it had been on a quiet New England farm, instead of what were then the wilds of Arizona.

The ranch had been well secured. The bar across the door was a massive one, and those at the shutters of the two windows—a large one, besides the small opening already referred to—was equally strong and thick. The bars lay in stout wooden sockets, so that they could easily be dropped in and lifted out—from the inside.

The inside of the hut was almost pitch-dark, every opening being closed, and even such chunks as there were between the logs not affording any light, for the moon had sunk out of sight some time before, and there were no stars visible.

What is this in the black darkness of the hut?

Nothing can be seen, but the indefinable warning of a living, moving presence, silent and watchful, is in the very air.

Listen! A whispered word!

"Guerillo!"

"Vell?"

"Under the pillow!"

"Vell, I git him. You not mind. Only keep quiet!"

"Go ahead then!"

Now, by looking carefully with eyes accustomed to the gloom, one can see that the larger window is wide open and that the Mexican and Jim Townley are sneaking cautiously about the room, each with a six-shooter in his hand. They mean murder—if necessary!

"Jeem!" from the Mexican.

"Yes."

"Stand by ze side of ze dude. Kill him, if he gits up."

The other did not answer, but as he took his

stand by the side of the table on which Dude Grier lay, there was a malicious gleam that seemed to show itself even in the darkness, and that indicated with what pleasure Jim Townley would have sent a bullet through the head of the sleeper, without any more provocation than had already been given him in the success the young fellow had had with Lucy Laurent, in contradiction to the contempt with which she had treated Jim Townley.

But Townley had other important business on hand now, and he could not afford to wreak his vengeance upon the young man at this time, although he muttered inwardly that he would get even at the first opportunity.

Jim Townley was not a man to forgive or to let his thirst for vengeance evaporate in time.

The Mexican reached the side of the Terror, otherwise Boston Bob—and cautiously bent over him. He was listening to the breathing of the sleeper.

"It vas all right," thought Guerillo, as with his revolver poised in his right hand, ready for instant use, he stole his left, with an easy, gliding movement that would hardly have stirred a rose-leaf, under the pillow.

He encountered the hilt of a knife. Cautiously he tried to pull it out. One touch was enough to assure the wily Mexican that the knife had caught in some way in the bed-clothes, and that an attempt to pull it out would result in the awakening of the detective, and then—The Mexican did not care to follow out in his mind what would take place if the gentle Bob were to awake and get the drop on the intruder.

Guerillo glanced around, and he could just make out his partner standing in the darkness with his pistol pointed at Arthur Grier's head, waiting for the Mexican to accomplish his purpose, whatever it might be.

A dexterous movement, and the Mexican drew forth the pocketbook from beneath the pillow.

Like a flash, he reached the open window where he was joined on the instant by Townley.

"Got it, hev yer?" in a scarcely audible whisper.

"Yees," in the same tone.

"Come on, then."

"Vait."

"Why?"

"I would not take hees pocketbook for von million dollars. He find it out an' hunt us down, as sure as hees name Boston Bob. I know heem."

"Rot!"

"No, I know heem."

There was no affectation of terror on the part of the Mexican. He meant just what he said. While he would not hesitate to take a paper from the pocketbook, he felt somehow that if he stole the pocketbook itself there would be no safety for him—that the Terror would get back his property if he had to kill a dozen Mexicans to do it.

While these thoughts passed through his mind, Guerillo felt among the contents of the pocketbook with those wonderfully facile fingers of his, and selecting the paper that contained part of the plan of the hidden mines, by the texture of it, took it out and placed it in an inside pocket of his shirt.

To reach the side of the detective and place the pocketbook on his pillow was the work of little more than a second. He rejoined Jim, and just touching him, as a hint to follow, bounded through the open window and disappeared.

Jim Townley had one leg over the window ledge, and the other in the air, when, suddenly, he felt himself pulled out by a pair of muscular hands, as a feminine voice that he recognized at once as that of Bess Morrow, exclaimed, in heart-broken, yet horror-stricken tones:

"Oh, Jim Townley, my father is murdered."

"Murdered!" ejaculated Townley, completely dazed.

But just then there was a glare of light, as Boston Bob struck a match, and leveling his revolver at Townley's head, yelled in a voice of thunder:

"Throw up your hands, or you are a dead man."

CHAPTER VI.

AN ENCOUNTER IN A CAVE.

WHEN Jim Townley and Guerillo the Mexican found themselves standing upon the fallen log across the deep chasm in the mountains, on the morning after their little adventure in Dude Grier's cabin, both appeared to be in excellent humor with themselves, and each other.

"I got thar, Guerillo, but it wuz er narr squeak."

"Yees?"

"You bet. When he jumped off his bed, with the durned gun uv his in his hand, and told me to throw up my hands, I thought I wuz gone, sure, 'specielly ez Bess Morrow hed hold uv me."

"Yees. Wal, how vas it you got away?"

The Mexican had heard the story before, but he knew it pleased his partner to tell it, so he obligingly drew him out to give him an opportunity of doing so.

"Wal" continued Townley, "when he hed his gun p'nted at me in the thar wicked way,

thar wuz jist one thing ez I could do, an' I done it. I pulled Bess around in front uv me, so ez he couldn't hit me 'less he shot through her, an' then I broke fur the clump uv pines an' got cl'ar away."

"Good!"

"Yes, but I only jist made it. He banged away at me, an' he put er bullet through the crown uv my hat, so clean that if I'd growed an inch 'bout that time it would ha' been good by to James Townley, Esq."

To corroborate his statement the desperado took off his large, soft-felt hat and exhibited a hole that spoke well for the marksmanship of the pale-faced little professor, who walked about Arizona in toothpick shoes, and carried a whisk brush for the benefit of his clothes in the far West.

While the two men were talking they were not wasting time. They were making their way to old Silas Laurent's ranch, which they found just as Townley had left it when he carried away his load of jeweled weapons, to apparently lose them in the depths of the ravine down which he had appeared to slip from the fallen log.

When the two worthies reached the great chest in Silas's ranch, each filled his arms with all he could carry, and hurried back to the fallen log, slipping off it out of sight and reappearing again in good time in the same mysterious manner as before.

Another trip to the ranch and the chest was empty, the spoils being conveyed to the chasm with its mysterious fallen tree.

Let us follow Guerillo and Jim Townley as they slip off the log into space.

We have shown that they did not actually fall into the yawning abyss that lost itself in the gloom hundreds of feet below, because if they had done so they could not reappear so quickly.

When they slipped off the log they alighted on a solid platform of planks that ran parallel with the log, underneath and in such a position that it could not be seen by the casual observer. Indeed it would have been a dangerous proceeding for a stranger to have stepped down. He would have been more than likely to slip off the edge of the platform and take that awful plunge into space which the Mexican and Townley always avoided so cleverly.

The last time they dropped upon the platform each held an armful of pistols, that had been packed away in the bottom of old Laurent's chest so that they would occupy as little room as possible. Guerillo went first. No sooner had he sunk out of sight under the log than Jim Townley dropped down, too.

And now, where he stood upon the platform behind the Mexican he waits while that swarthy gentleman walks cautiously along the light framework to where the end of the log is still fastened by its tangled roots in the crumbling earth, as if it would hold to its natural position so long as the least vitality remained to it.

Among the mass of gnarled and twisted fibers, to which the loose earth sticks in blotches and heaps, the Mexican sees something that has a use altogether apart from the needs of the tree. To the ordinary eye it is only a piece of the root—a tough-looking, bent wite, that runs in and out with its fellows in the wild disorder that nature had decided was right.

But what is this? The Mexican seizes the piece of root and pulls it sharply.

Instantly, a large portion of what appears to be only earth and roots comes away in his hand, as it were. It swings around in a solid mass, revealing an irregular opening in the bank about four feet square, black and dark, and leading, for all one can see, into the very bowels of the mountain.

Guerillo did not indulge in any speculations as to what was inside the hole. He knew all about it. He threw his pistols carelessly through the opening, and they dropped out of sight with a rattle and crash. Then he followed the pistols, going in feet first and slowly disappearing in a jerky manner that indicated a going down steps.

"All right, Guerillo?" growled Townley interrogatively.

"All right. Of course it was all right," was the Mexican's ungracious response.

Jim Townley muttered something in his throat that was not complimentary to his partner. Then he, too, put his feet through the hole and rejoined Guerillo.

The two stood in an apartment about eight feet square that would have been quite dark but for an oil lamp that hung upon the wall, with a reflector behind it. This lamp showed that the room was furnished like that of the ordinary miner's cabin. A rough table, two stools, a cot-bed and a mattress along the wall on the floor. In a recess some loose bread and scraps of meat, with a large stone jug that probably contained whisky.

In a corner were piled up the guns and pistols stolen from Silas Laurent's ranch.

"Vell, v'at now, Jeem?" asked the Mexican, as he dropped upon one of the stools and carelessly pushed some of the scattered weapons on the floor out of his way. "V'at are ve to do with her?"

"Do with her? Wal, now, Guerillo, yer need not bother yerself 'bout her. She's in my car."

I'll 'tend to her. An' yer may ez well understand that, right hyar an' now."

Jim Townley spoke in his usual gruff tones, and there was an ugly gleam in his eyes as he rolled them around in their deep sockets like a famished wild beast.

It was not the Mexican's purpose to quarrel with his surly companion, evidently. For a second there was a nervous twitching of Guerillo's waxed mustache, and the yellow fangs beneath it were revealed in an ugly stretching of the mouth, that would have been a sarcastic smile had it not been more like the snarl of a wild beast. His hand stole toward the knife of which the handle was just perceptible in his belt. But these movements were all over almost as soon as they were made. The snarl became milder, resolving itself into something like a smile, as Guerillo said:

"V'at you mean, Jeem? Do you zink I vant ze gal? Oh, no. All I vant is—is—Vell, you know. Ve vill not mention it before her, eh?"

He threw his right forefinger over his shoulder with the light, delicate action peculiar to people of Spanish blood, even when but a very little of it runs in their veins. It was a gesture of warning, carelessness and self-abnegation, all expressed at once, and all unmistakable. It meant that Jim Townley could do what he pleased with Lucy Laurent, for all the Mexican cared, and it also signified that it would not be well to reveal all their plans before her.

Jim Townley did not reply. He walked over to a corner, where what appeared to be a carelessly-hung curtain, that might have concealed a cupboard, was moving in a fluttering sort of way, although there was no wind in the room. He pulled aside the curtain, and there, on a rough wooden bench, sat Lucy Laurent. A handkerchief was tied tightly over her mouth, her hands were fastened behind her, and a strong rope around her waist held her securely to the bench, which was fastened into the wall.

"Durned shame!" muttered Townley, as he looked at her. He unfastened the handkerchief that was tied over her mouth, despite the frowns of the Mexican.

He soon had reason to regret it. Lucy Laurent was a pretty, refined-looking girl, and so long as she did not consider herself imposed upon to too great an extent was good-tempered. But she had an indomitable spirit, and her tongue could run with awful rapidity, when she considered that there was occasion for it.

No sooner was the gag out of her mouth, therefore, than she sprung, verbally, upon the unlucky Townley, and called him to account with a vigor that made him cower before her like the veriest cur.

"What do you mean by this, Jim Townley? Don't you know that when this thing gets out, your miserable life won't be worth a minute's purchase? Don't yer know it, I say?"

"I don't know nothing," replied Jim sulkily.

"Zat vas right. He don't know nothing," put in the Mexican with his ghastly grin. "I—"

"You shet up, will yer," interposed Townley, fiercely. "I know ez much ez is good for you. This is none of your funeral, nohow."

"I vas only going to say—"

"Don't say nothing. You'll only give yer self away."

"Both of yer shet up," put in Lucy, impatiently. "I want ter know what yer brought me hyer for, that's all. It's 'bout ther silliest thing either ov yer hez ever done, I'm thinkin', an' yer 'll find it out afore I git through with yer."

"Don't git mad, Lucy," pleaded Townley, as gently as his gruff voice would allow. "It's jist 'cause I love yer, Lucy, that's all. A man gits desp'rate sometimes, yer know."

"You must hev been durned desperate ever to hev done er thing like this, that'll hang yer, ez sure ez yer stand shakin' an' quakin' thar like the coward ez yer are. What d'ye expect to do with me? D'yer think ez yer kin make me marry yer jist because yer hev dragged me down into this hyar cave, with ther help uv thet hang-dog Greaser thar? Is that what yer think?"

"I don't know what I think," responded Jim Townley humbly. "Guess I don't think nothin'."

"Guess yer don't. Yer never spoke a truer word than that thar," said Lucy, contemptuously. Then changing her tone to one of stern command, she cried: "Jim Townley, loosen this hyar rope 'round my waist and untie my hands."

"Can't do it, Lucy."

"What d'yer mean?"

"I mean ez I've got ter keep yer safe, an' ther only way to do that is to keep yer tied up. It won't be for long. In fact, it needn't be for more'n five minutes ef you take a solemn oath to marry me ez soon ez we kin git before the 'squire."

"Yes, an' the 'squire u'd like ther job wouldn't he? He's er friend uv yours ain't he? Wal, I ain't er goin' ter give yer no promise. You know that when I say er thing I allers keep my word, in spite ov everything, don't yer?"

"Yes, Lucy. Thet's why I want yer ter promise. Then I'd know I wuz ez good ez married."

"Wal, I ain't goin' ter promise. I wouldn't marry you if you wuz er good man, an' a hand-

some man, and a young man, and a squar' man. You ain't any of them, an' I'd die before I'd even let you hold my hand for half a minute. Thet's how I feel to you, Jim Townley. But I'll tell yer this. I allers keep my word, ez I hev said, an' I sw'ar now that I will hang you to a pine tree in Hopeful Gulch within a month if I live."

The girl's excitement, which had reached to a fearful pitch, here dissolved in tears that ran down her cheeks of their own free will, she being unable to wipe them of course, while her hands were tied behind her back.

"Eef she leaves! Ha, hal! Zat vas goot!" chuckled Guerillo to himself as he turned to the heap of j-welded weapons stolen from Silas Laurent, for consolation.

"What will we do with the gal?" whispered Townley to the Mexican.

Guerillo looked up with a dark smile.

"Wait! She come around. Let her alone."

"But—"

"Let her alone, I tell you! I 'tend to her. V'at matter eef she not like you? Ve make her marry you, eh? But all in ze goot time. Caramba!"

These remarks were exchanged in a whisper inaudible to Lucy Laurent, but she guessed enough of their purport to fight back the tears, and glance disdainfully at the two men that had taken such cowardly advantage of her.

They moved toward the opening by which they had entered, and which they had left exposed, not fearing any intrusion from strangers just now. Jim leaned carelessly against the steps, looking moodily at Lucy, who was far enough away from him to permit of his watching her without being exposed to the disdainful gaze that she usually bestowed upon him, and which he feared more than a pistol in the hands of a man.

"Guerillo?"

"Well?"

"Did you find the paper afore yer took ther gal away?"

"No."

"Yer didn't?"

"I tell you no."

"Then, whar is it?"

"Haven't you seen it? What vas you doing in zat big chest, eef you not find it?"

"I wuz bringin' out thet thar truck," kicking the heap of glittering guns and pistols aside contemptuously. "I s'posed you hed ther paper."

The Mexican gnashed his white teeth and pulled savagely at one of the spikes of his waxed mustache.

"Caramba! Dere is only one thing, zen."

"What is it?"

"To get it from the old man!"

The Mexican spoke significantly, and half drew his bowie-knife as he hissed the words.

Lucy Laurent, tied up at the end of the cave, saw the action by the dim light of the lamp on the wall, and although she could not hear the accompanying words, something seemed to tell her it was a menace against her father.

The Mexican did not notice her, as he went on in a low tone:

"We haf the two papers, or we know v'ere zey are. Morrow has von, an' I baf another. Ve must haf ze third. Silas Laurent baf it in his pocket somev're, an' he moost die if he not gif it up any other vay."

"Well, he won't give it up if he kin help et. Bet yer life on that," put in Townley, sulkily.

"I don't believe he vill, Jeem, so—ve moost kill him, eh?"

"I don't car'. He might ez wal be rubbed out. I don't want a father-in-law anyhow," rejoined the other, with a brutal chuckle. "Sides, I bev been near enough to being rubbed out myself within ther last two days not to car' much 'bout any one else. I tell yer that bullet from the pistol of that thar Professor what you call Boston Bob went cl'ar through my ha'r, an' clipped er little piece outen my ear."

The Mexican looked up with sudden interest.

"V'at! you mean to say Ze Professor plugged at you an' missed you? V'y, he never miss."

"Wal, he missed me anyhow, or I wouldn't be hyar ter tell yer 'bout it, would I?" growled Jim. "Thet wild thing, Bess Morrow, grabbed me just at ther moment, an' disturbed his aim, I s'pose. Then I jist stepped out an' got 'Sides, ez I told yer, she was 'tween me an' him."

"V'at vas Bess doing zere, d'ye think?"

"I dunno. She yawped out somethin', but I was too rattled ter take pertickler notice uv it."

"Caramba! I hope nothing vas wrong with Morrow."

As he spoke the word, Morrow, the reflection of what Bessie Morrow had said came back to him in an instant, and mechanically he repeated: "Oh, Jim Townley, my father is murdered!"

"V'at!" howled Guerillo, as he sprung for the opening.

At the same instant there was a sudden darkening of the hole as some one approached it from the outside, and before either Guerillo or Townley knew what they were doing they found themselves rolling in a confused heap on the floor at the bottom of the steps, with old Silas Laurent smelling very strongly of whisky, holding them both in a deadly clutch.

CHAPTER VII.
A FOUL CHARGE.

LET us go back to Dude Grier's cabin, which had been thrown into an uproar by the sudden appearance of Bess Morrow and the escape of Jim Townley.

So many events had crowded upon each other that Dude Grier did not comprehend what had happened, until he saw The Professor throw open the door and drag Bess Morrow into the cabin.

There was just a shade of excitement to be noted in Boston Bob's face, but it was hardly enough to disturb his wonted calmness, and when he had motioned Bess to a seat in the low rocker and fastened the door again, he turned around with a countenance smiling and smooth as usual.

Grier had lighted a lamp just as The Professor opened the door, and the little cabin looked quite cheerful, as Bess Morrow turned from one to the other, and with an agitation altogether foreign to her usual robust self-assurance, moved her white lips stiffly in forming the words:

"My father!"

"What about him?" asked Dude Grier.

"Dead!" observed The Professor, quietly.

"Murdered!" wailed the girl.

Dude Grier, it will be remembered, was inside the cabin when Bess Morrow told Townley that her father had been killed, and it was not till now that he knew a tragedy had taken place in Arch Morrow's saloon.

"We had better go with her, I suppose," said Dude Grier.

"Why?" asked The Professor, coolly.

"Oh, my poor father!" moaned Bess. "Cut down like a dog, and by that miserable sneak, Mat Clark."

"Ah!" ejaculated Grier. "How was it?"

In a few words Bess told how she had been awakened by hearing her father moving about, and how she had partly opened her door, intending to speak to him, just as Mat Clark had stabbed him to the heart. Then she had seized the murderer, but he had wrenched himself away from her, and had dashed away into the mountains, while she had come here to her best friend, as she said—Dude Grier.

The two men listened attentively to her story, and then The Professor observed, in a matter-of-fact way:

"Well, the first thing to do is to get some sleep. We will see what is to be done in the morning."

"Sleep? With my father lying dead at home?" cried Bess, indignantly.

"Why not? He won't move till the morning."

Professor Roberts was not heartless. He pitied Bess Morrow from the bottom of his heart. But he knew that nothing could be done before daylight, especially by tired people, and he put the case bluntly.

In less than five minutes he had persuaded the girl to lie down upon the bed from which he had lately arisen so hurriedly. Then he told Grier to go to his own couch, finishing up his directions by curling himself up on the low rocker, and after extinguishing the light, going off to sleep as placidly as if he were a child; but with his pistols in his belt ready for any possible disturbers.

But there were no disturbers, and the three remained quietly on their respective couches until the sun was high in the heavens. The little cabin was so closely shuttered that the inmates would have had nothing to warn them that it was daylight outside, even if they had been awake.

They were not awake, however; Bob and Dude had dropped off to sleep at once, and poor Bess, after tossing about uneasily for hours, had at last succumbed to the quiet influence of the cabin, and had forgotten her troubles in a deep, dreamless slumber.

Robert was the first to arouse himself.

He uncurled himself from the rocking-chair, and taking off the coat and vest he had hastily thrown on when he had been disturbed by the operations of Jim Townley and Guerillo, opened the door of the cabin and stepped out into the sunlight.

He consulted a dainty watch he wore in his fob, and which he would back against the sun in the matter of keeping time, and shook his head.

"Nearly noon! Time for old Morrow's murderer to have got clear away, if he has sense enough," he reflected.

Then he gave his attention to his toilet, which appeared to be of more importance in his eyes than anything else.

There was a spring of pure mountain water a few yards from the hut, but hidden from the doorway by an intervening clump of pines.

Robert evidently knew the locality as well as if he had lived there all his life.

He stepped over to the spring, and after taking a deep draught of the clear liquid, hung his coat, vest, gorgeous necktie and Derby hat on convenient trees, and proceeded with his toilet.

He went about it as coolly as if he had been in an elegantly appointed dressing-room in a New York mansion, the only thing about his appearance in accordance with his primitive surroundings being the pair of silver-mounted six-shooters that hung in leather scabbards on either hip.

He produced a tooth-brush and shaving-tackle

from a small dressing-case, and hanging a hand mirror on a tree, shaved, washed and put on his clothes with a care and deliberation characteristic of a man who believed that no circumstances could arise which justified a neglect of personal appearance.

Robert had arrayed himself to his satisfaction, had just placed the Derby hat at what he considered the proper angle on his light hair, and with his gold-rimmed glasses on his nose, was stooping to apply some patent polish to the toothpick shoes, when he saw something at a little distance that brought a slight smile to his lip, as his left hand flew to one of his silver-mounted revolvers.

Bang!

A small black object that had caught his eye just above a ledge of rock disappeared on the instant.

"Um! I thought so!"

Robert uttered this remark in a satisfied tone as he replaced the empty cartridge in his pistol with a new one, and went on applying the polish to his toothpick shoes with a small sponge on a stick.

"I hate to have strangers about while I am dressing," he soliloquized, as he put the sponge and stick into his bottle of polish, and stowed the whole away in his dressing-case.

He strolled slowly back to the cabin, wondering who was the owner of the hat that had appeared above the ledge of rock.

"Well, I sent a bullet through it, anyhow, as a hint to the man under it not to play the eavesdropper. That is a comfort to me, whoever he may have been."

As he reached the door of the hut, Bess Morrow, coming out hastily, almost ran into his arms.

"Did you see him?" she cried, breathlessly.

"See? Whom?"

"Him—Mat Clark!"

"Clark?"

"Yes. He was here—here—looking in at the window!"

"Why didn't you shoot him down?"

"I would if I had had a weapon."

"Where was Dude?"

"He is at the back of the cabin somewhere, gathering wood for the fire for breakfast."

"He's a sensible fellow. Come inside. Breakfast is a good idea."

Dude appeared at this juncture with an armful of wood, and The Professor walked into the cabin and began to assist the host in making coffee and frying pork, in so neat and dainty a fashion that he did not even soil his fingers, much less disarrange the exact disposal of his costume.

Bess, with her hands clasped to her forehead, looked at the two men in a dazed fashion, as if she hardly comprehended what they were about.

Bob was thinking with an activity utterly belied by his deliberate and careless manner.

"What did Mat Clark want around here?" he was asking himself. "If he has killed the girl's father he can hardly expect her to look upon him with favor. And yet—yet— Well, love is a peculiar passion."

"What is peculiar, Bob?" asked Dude, as he passed the other, with a coffee-pot in his hand.

Bob had unconsciously spoken the last sentence aloud.

"Peculiar, Dude? Why, love to be sure. Is it not, eh?"

"Yes," sighed Dude.

"Um! Well, let us have some breakfast."

Bob had very little sentiment in his soul—at least that was his boast—and he soon appeared to grow tired of such subjects as love.

The three sat at the table, and the savory meal was enough to tempt even poor Bess to eat and drink, especially with such a kind and attentive waiter as Bob.

He forced upon her such viands as they had with quiet admonitions that eating was as necessary as sleeping, and that if she expected to avenge her father's death she must not begin by letting her strength run down.

Bess did as she was told.

There was something in the tone of the dude from Boston that conveyed a command even when the words were those almost of supplication.

Bess had managed to eat a better breakfast than even Bob expected, hard as he had tried to force food upon her, he and Dude had eaten and drank with the business-like air of men who knew that they would need all the strength they could get up, when there was an interruption.

The voices of men coming nearer and nearer rung out on the morning air, and by the time Dude Grier and Robert Roberts had put the tin cups and dishes aside, and prepared themselves to receive their visitors, whoever they might be, there were a dozen miners in front of the cabin door.

Dude Grier stepped outside.

"Well, boys, what's the trouble?"

"Trouble enough!" answered a short, puffy man, with bushy gray whiskers, a red nose, and twinkling eyes. "Trouble enough. Archibald Morrow was murdered some time last night."

"I know it."

"Yer do? Wal, I must say yer take it mighty cool. P'raps yer know who killed him?"

"I do."

"Yer do! Great catamounts! Ef you ain't a peart young feller. Whar is ther party ez killed him? P'raps you kin tell me that, too?"

"Perhaps I can, and perhaps I cannot," answered Dude, quietly.

"Wal, young feller, you'd better speak right up. I represent the law, ez you know. I'm 'squire uv this hyer deestrict, an' I don't want no foolin'. Yer understand?"

"Oh, cut it short, 'squire. Make him bring out ther gal," interposed one of the miners, impatiently.

"That's so," agreed the 'squire.

"What's the matter?" asked Robert Roberts, as he appeared from the interior of the cabin and stood by Grier's side.

"Who ther dence are you?" spluttered the 'squire. "Hadu't you better go back to sellin' dry goods in Denver, or wharever yer come from?"

Robert did not reply, but a loud guffaw from the miners told how they enjoyed the sally of the puffy 'squire.

"Bring out ther gal," growled the miners again, as their laughter subsided.

The 'squire straightened himself, and in judicial tones said:

"Arthur Grier, I represent the law."

"Well?"

"You understand that thar?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I hev information ez er sart'in person, known ez Bess Morrow, is—is—"

"Concealed," suggested a miner, noticing that the 'squire paused for a word.

But the suggestion was not taken in good part, for the 'squire turned short around, and looking at the miner severely, growled:

"Sam Perkins, when ther law wants you ter assist it, I will say so. In ther mean time, keep yer head shut."

The discomfited miner did not reply, and the 'squire, turning to Arthur Grier again, went on with his speech, not disdaining to use the word suggested by the unfortunate Sam Perkins, however.

"I believe ez you hev this hyar sart'in person, Bess Morrow, concealed about the premises."

"Indeed!" said Arthur, coldly.

"Now, young man, don't you talk back at ther law. D'yer hear?" spluttered the 'squire.

"With yer indeed, and indeed."

"But—"

"Shet up. I tell yer, Dude Grier, I know ther Bess Morrow is in this hyar cabin, an' I want her."

"What for?"

But Bess Morrow, who had been kept carefully out of sight by Robert Roberts until the purpose of the 'squire's visit could be learned, here broke through all restraint, and, with flashing eyes, red with weeping, stood facing the 'squire and the miners.

"Here I am. Now what have you got to say to me?" she demanded.

"Hold on thar, Bess. Hold on thar! Don't yer persue ter hurry ther law. It won't do no good, I tell yer," said the 'squire, backing away a little. "You're a good gal—"

"You fool! What's that to you?" snapped Bess.

"Oh, boys, did yer hear that? She called ther law er fool. Durn me ef I don't think ther will send her to the Penitentiary for twenty years without anything else," exclaimed the 'squire, horrified at the girl's irreverence.

"'Squire," put in Boston Bob, mildly, "this young woman is nearly crazy over the death of her father, and hardly knows what she says or does. Will you tell her what you want with her, and I'll answer for it that she will not dispute it. I have so much respect for the law myself, especially in the person of such an able representative as I see before me, that I shall use what influence I possess with her to make her acknowledge your authority at once."

Robert bowed profoundly to the justice as he spoke, and waited, with an air of great respect for an answer.

The 'squire was flattered by the deference of the well-dressed stranger, and answered him in a much milder tone than he had used hitherto:

"The fact is, I must take this girl, Bess Morrow, down to her father's saloon, where I'm just goin' ter hold an inquest."

"As a witness, I suppose."

"Ya-as," returned the 'squire hesitatingly.

"Partly for that."

"And what else?"

"Wal, yer see—some ov ther boys, they say—"

"What?" interrupted Bess, eagerly.

"They say—ez—ez—"

"Well, well?" impatiently.

"Say yer murdered yer father!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JAIL AT HOPEFUL GULCH.

A MOTLEY crowd was gathered in Arch Morrow's saloon-grocery an hour later.

The occasion was the inquest upon the body of the late proprietor, and it was being conducted with all solemnity under the presidency of

Squire Caldwell acting coroner of Yuma county, Southern Arizona.

The remains were lying on an improvised couch consisting of two tables placed end to end, and were arrayed in the clothes Morrow had worn when he received his death-blow.

The puffy 'squire took his seat in a big armchair near the body, while Bess, on the other side, occasionally touched the rough garment of her dead father with a trembling, caressing hand.

The miners who had accompanied the girl to Dude Grier's cabin stood around, with their hats in their hands and an expression of solemnity on their faces, while Dude and Boston Bob took up their positions near Bess as if to be ready to give her either physical or moral support should she require it.

One of the miners had been appointed to act as bartender, *pro tem.*, by the 'squire, and he was standing behind the bar, rather proud of the distinction, albeit the 'squire kept a wary and suspicious eye upon him, to make sure that he put any money received for drinks into the money drawer for the benefit of Arch Morrow's heirs, whoever they might prove to be.

"Sam Perkins," said the 'squire to the miner behind the bar, "drinks for the crowd and the court will pay for them. Hurry, now."

Sam Perkins put out the bottles and glasses with a flourish, and all the men, including Dude Grier and Boston Bob, stepped up to partake of the 'squire's bounty, that puffy individual counting heads rapidly and handing the exact amount in payment to the temporary bartender.

"Now, then, ter bizness. Who's the fu'st witness?"

Here was a difficulty. It was recollect that there were no witnesses, and the court was in a quandary.

"I don't ezactly remember what's ther proper thing ter do when ther warn't no one see thar deed," remarked the 'squire, half to himself and half apologetically to those around him.

The miners seemed to sympathize with the 'squire, and Bob could scarcely suppress a smile.

"I can tell you how he looked when I found him," here broke in a voice that Dude Grier recognized as that of Mat Clark.

Sure enough, that lantern-jawed gentleman, who had entered the saloon while everybody was at the bar, shouldered himself into the front rank, and twisting nervously his big black hat—which Bob noticed, with much interest, had a round hole through the crown—stood ready to be examined.

"Hello, Mat Clark! You will be ther fu'st witness," observed the 'squire triumphantly. "How do you swear?"

Mat did not seem to know how he swore, so the 'squire administered the oath in the usual form to the effect that the witness should "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," etc., and then looked him over with so much judicial severity that the witness hardly knew where he was.

"Now, tell us, in your own way, all you know about this case," went on the 'squire.

Mat Clark turned his hat around in his hands several times before he began, nervously:

"Wal, your Honor—"

"Quite right. Go on," interrupted the 'squire, very much enjoying Mat Clark's respectful form of speech.

"Wal, yer Honor, I had left this hyar place last night, after playin' er quiet game uv poker with some uv ther boys—"

"Did you win, Mat?" interrupted the court.

"Just a little."

"Ah! Just a little. I must put that thar down. It's important," remarked the 'squire, writing something upon the pad of legal cap with which he had provided himself.

Mat Clark went on:

"I left ther saloon an' hed got some piece on my way home, when I remembered ez I hed forgot—

"Remembered you forgot. Hum!"

The 'squire made another entry, and the witness resumed:

"I hed forgot ter take up a small note-book ez I keeps er diary in, an' what I had used ter put my chips on so ez I wouldn't forget them."

"Ah! You didn't forgit ther chips, did yer?"

"No, yer honor."

"All right. Drive ahead."

"When I came back, the door wuz fastened, an' I looked through the keyhole."

"Yes."

"An' I see—"

"What did you see?" put in Bess, who was looking at Mat Clark with blazing eyes.

The witness did not answer Bess, nor did he even look at her as he continued:

"I see Bess Morrow step behind her father and stab him."

The words were hardly out of Mat Clark's mouth when Bess sprung upon him, and bore him to the floor in a smashed, disgruntled heap.

At the same moment Dude and Robert seized the girl firmly, but gently, and drew her away.

"Let me get at him! Let me get at him!" screamed the girl in a fury.

"Bess, mind the court," said the 'squire, with dignity.

"Hang the court," replied Bess. "The scoundrel."

"Scoundrel! Do you dare ter call ther court a scoundrel!" exclaimed the 'squire, puffing more than ever in his outraged dignity.

"'Squire," cried Bess, without beeding the question of the court, "I call Heaven to witness that Mat Clark murdered my father, and that I saw him do it."

Mat laughed, but there was a greenish glint in his eyes that told how willingly he would have stopped the girl's mouth, even by murder.

"Why, 'squire," he said. "This hyer is jist ther way people allers talk when they is accused uv er crime. Try to put it on ter ther party ez accuses 'em, yer know that, 'squire."

"In course I know it," returned the 'squire with dignity, "an' I don't need ter be told by you, Mat Clark, nor no one else."

"What an egotistical old fool," whispered Robert to Dude. "That Clark is twisting him around his finger."

"I know it," answered Dude, in the same guarded tone. "Shall we break up the inquest by kicking the 'squire into the street?"

"No. Not now. Listen."

Robert bent forward as he spoke, so as not to lose any of the oracular utterances of 'Squire Caldwell.

"Bess Morrow," he began, holding up his finger to bespeak general attention. "You are charged with having caused the death of your father Archibald Morrow, by means of er stab inflicted with er sharp instrument, called er knife, and now in court."

"Here the 'squire gave utterance to a portentous "Hem!" and held up the knife that Mat Clark had left with the dead man to convey the idea that he had committed suicide.

"Go on, 'squire," muttered Bess with her eyes fixed on the yellow countenance of her accuser.

"I'm goin' on, Bess. Don't interrupt the court. Now, it ain't no use you denying uv it, 'cause Mat Clark, thar, see yer do it."

"But, 'squire, yer don't believe that lyin' coyote do yer?" cried Bess, in agony, as the full meaning of the accusation seemed to burst upon her. "You must know ez I loved my father. 'Sides, I saw this man, Mat Clark, sneak down from the loft, whar my father used ter let him sleep when he didn't want ter go all ther way to his ranch in the mountains, and drive the knife inter his heart. I rushed out of my room to try and stop him. But I wuz too late, an' then I run out to Dude Grier's cabin ter tell him —'cause I knowed he wuz er squar' man—an' I didn't come back, 'cause Dude an' this hyar swell chap with ther store clothes, told me it wouldn't be any use, seein' ez I couldn't do anything for my poor father then, an' I'd better sleep till morning."

'Squire Caldwell made copious entries on the legal cap while Bess was speaking, and looked more profound than ever.

"Bess," he began, after taking off his spectacles and wiping them with a large red handkerchief before replacing them on his nose, "Bess, I've heerd your remarks, and thar might be some p'nt in them—only—only—you come too late."

"Too late!" exclaimed Bess.

"Yes, you see, ther law can't go back on itself. Wal, ther law in this hyar case hez already listened to Mat Clark's yarn, an' taken it fer gospel."

Here the 'squire paused to write something more on his paper.

"We are learning something here," whispered Dude to Robert, to which Robert replied only by a significant nudge.

"Very well, then," went on the 'squire, "this hyar court can't listen ter anything ther pris'ner hez to say. She will be committed ter jail on a charge uv murder to answer at the next term of criminal court of Yuma county, Arizona. Ther court is adjourned. Sam Perkins and Mat Clark, the court appoints you special officers to take care uv ther pris'ner, an' ter see that she is kept safely in jail till she hez ter appear in court. I will take charge uv the bar now while Sam Perkins looks after ther pris'ner, an' thar is one free drink fer every one hyar. Name yer p'ison."

The 'squire stepped behind the bar to dispense the refreshments to the eager miners, while Sam Perkins, Mat Clark, Dude Grier and Robert Roberts gathered around Bess, who was sobbing as if her heart would break at the head of the table upon which lay the rigid form of her dead father.

"Come on, Bess. I'm sorry fer yer," whined Mat, as he put out his hand to take her arm.

It was a bad move for Mat.

The girl turned upon him like a tigress, and before he could stir her powerful right arm shot out, and she sent him tumbling over the miners drinking at the bar with a well-directed blow between the eyes.

All the indignation and disgust in her bosom found vent in that blow, and Mat Clark lay a heap of discomfited meanness, among broken glasses and spilled liquor, at the feet of the miners.

"You snake!" she hissed, grinding her firm white teeth.

Clark glared at her from beneath his lowering eyebrows for an instant, and sprung to his feet with a knife in his hand.

He meant murder!

But Boston Bob was watching him, and ere the maddened wretch could reach the girl, a strong white hand held him by the wrist, while a soft voice drawled:

"Easy, my impetuous friend!"

It was only for a moment that Mat Clark struggled vainly in the grasp of the detective. Then the frown died away from his brow, and a sickly smile overspread his face, as he said:

"You air right. I wuz er fool ter mind ther gal. In course she don't feel good ter me. But it wuzn't my fault."

"Liar!" burst from Bess, who, but for the restraining hand of Dude Grier would have followed up the forceful word with another blow.

Bob leaned toward her and whispered a few words in her ear.

She nodded, and turning to Sam Perkins, said, in a quiet tone that indicated how hard she was trying to control herself:

"Sam, I will go with you to the jail. But don't let that feller tech me."

Without answering, Sam Perkins turned to go.

Bess threw herself upon the corpse of her father, and remained with her face hidden on his breast for at least half a minute. Then she arose, and without looking to right or left, marched out of the house, with set, pale face, in which a strong resolution of some kind could be read by the most careless observer.

She was closely followed by Bob, Dude and Sam Perkins, with Mat Clark bringing up the rear.

Five minutes' walk along the main street brought them to a log house of a more pretentious character than any other in Hopeful Gulch. It was two-stories high and boasted of a well-built porch along its entire front. It had been built by an Englishman who had come to the Gulch in its early days, with plenty of money, in the expectation of making a fortune in silver mining. He had never made the fortune, but had lived in the best of style while his money lasted. When that was gone, he had sold out what he had, and the house had fallen into the possession of 'Squire Caldwell, who lived in it and kept a large back room up-stairs, with one barred window for a prison. This "prison" was seldom used, its only occupants before this having been miners who became too obstreperous under the influence of the fiery liquor sold at Hopeful Gulch, and were confined as much for their own safety as that of other people.

Into this room Bess Morrow was led by Sam Perkins, Dude Grier and the detective, Mat prudently staying below on the porch.

The room was comfortably furnished, and save for the bars at the window, was suggestive of anything but a place of confinement.

Bess Morrow threw herself upon a bed that stood in one corner, the clean sheets on which bespake the presence in the house of a careful housekeeper, and buried her face in the pillows.

"Bess," said Dude, gently.

The girl did not answer, and, in response to a sign by the detective, the two men followed him out of the room, leaving the girl to herself.

Sam Perkins, in his capacity of special officer, locked the door, and adjusted a wooden bar across it, and the three went down-stairs and out to the porch, without meeting any one in the house, although Perkins placed the key of the prison chamber on a table in the empty front room ere he joined his companions outside.

CHAPTER IX.

A CLUTCH IN THE DARK.

WHEN Jim Townley and Guerillo found themselves rolling on the floor of the cave, with old Silas Laurent on top of them, they were for the moment too confused to know what had happened.

But they soon recovered. They were accustomed to act quickly in emergencies, and old Silas found himself in a clutch he could not shake off before he had time to regain his feet.

"My! What luck!" exclaimed Townley, triumphantly.

"Caramba! Now ve haf' ze old man."

"An' we'll make him give up that thar paper, or my name isn't Jim Townley."

"You will, will yer?" growled the old man, defiantly.

For answer Townley threw him on the floor, and the Mexican searched his pockets with a coolness and dexterity that bespoke long practice at that sort of work.

A few moments sufficed to assure Guerillo that the precious paper was not in Silas's pocket.

"Cut ther lining uv his coat," suggested Townley.

The Mexican drew his bowie-knife, and soon had the coat of the old man hanging in ribbons, but still no paper.

The rest of his clothing was carefully examined, but the conviction forced itself upon the desperadoes that, wherever the map and memoranda might be, they were certainly not concealed about the old miner's person.

"Ther old rascal!" muttered Townley, as he looked down at the old man, who was blinking at him with his bleary eyes, evidently enjoying his disappointment.

"See here," whispered the Mexican in Silas's

ear. "Tell us vere ze papiere ees that ve vant, an' you go right avay. See?"

The old man winked, as he answered, coolly:

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do, Silas Laurent, an' you air a goin' ter tell us."

"So?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I don't think so."

"Yer will think so, in er minute," returned Townley, confidently.

"Ez how? D'ye think I'm afraid uv anything yer will do ter me?"

"P'raps."

"Wal, I ain't. Not much. Old Silas Laurent hez lived too tough a life ter be afraid uv a boss-thief ar' a Greaser."

Guerillo made a threatening motion with his knife.

"Oh, I don't car' fer yer pig-sticker. Ef you vas to hurt me thar 'ud be ther whole camp down on yer 'fore yer could git away, an' you know it," went on the old man, quietly.

"Mebbe! But we'd take our chances on that."

"Then take yer chances, for I ain't got nothin' ter give up."

"And thar ain't nothin' ez will make yer tell us?"

"I hain't got nothin' ter tell," returned the old man doggedly.

"All right. Guerillo!"

"Vell!"

"Shove that thar curtain aside."

The Greaser walked to the back of the cave—the old man's bleary eyes following—and snatched away the curtain.

Something like a shriek came from Silas Laurent.

"Lucy!"

"Father!"

"Drop the curtain, Guerillo," commanded Townley with a grin.

The Mexican obeyed, and Townley turned again to Silas, who was sitting on the ground, staring vacantly at the curtain.

"Wal, Silas? What now?" asked Townley.

"You rascal!" was the old man's response.

"Will you tell me whar that paper is?"

"What paper?"

"The paper ez explains whar that claim is—ther claim ez wuz located twenty years ago, and lost. Ther claim ez will belong ter—"

The Mexican clapped his hands over the speaker's mouth.

"J-eem! Mind v'at you say!"

"All right. It don't matter who ther claim will belong ter. I know all 'bout that. But I want ter know whar ther paper is. You kin tell me an' you'll have ter."

"S'pose I don't?"

"Tuen I'll keep that gal uv yours down hyar, and you, too, till yer does. See?"

There was a fierce determination in the tone of the desperado that could not be mistaken.

There appeared to be a struggle in Silas Laurent's mind. Then he said:

"I'll tell yer."

"I thought yer would."

"Arch Morrow hez it."

"Arch Morrow!"

"Yes."

"Whar does he keep it?"

"How should I know? All ez I do know is that he hez that paper that you keep on talking about."

Jim Townley and Guerillo looked at each other significantly, and moved a little nearer to the opening, leaving the old man sitting on the ground, with his eyes fixed on the curtain that concealed his daughter.

A few words passed between the desperadoes, and then they seemed to have hit upon a plan of procedure.

They came back to the old man, and, with a business-like air, took some strong cord from one corner of the cave and tied his hands behind him, fastening the loose end of the cord around a projecting root of a tree that came through the roof of the cave, and was as firm as the everlasting hills around them.

"This ain't very nice treatment I don't think, gentlemen, after I've told yer what yer asked me, is it?"

There was a tinge of sarcasm in Silas Laurent's tone, but the two men did not notice it, apparently.

They left Silas tied up to the root, and without taking notice of Lucy, who they knew to be safely behind the curtain, went up the steps to the outer air.

The heavy door, formed of earth, matted with roots, that has already been described, was swung back into its place, and Silas Laurent and his daughter were practically buried alive.

Although there was no communication with the outside world, so far as could be discovered, the air of the cave was not too bad to breathe. There was some ventilation, but how it was afforded, probably neither Townley nor the Mexican could tell, and certainly Lucy and her father could not have explained it, had they tried.

But they did not try. They had other things to engage their attention.

"Lucy," called Silas, as soon as the closing of

the opening at the top of the stairs told him that the enemy had gone.

"Father?"

"This hyar's er pretty fix we're in, ain't it! How did yer come hyar?"

"Jim Townley an' the Greaser came ter ther house ez soon ez you hed gone out, an' brought me. They hev been at that big chest uv yours, too."

"I see," answered her father, mournfully, as he looked about by the light of the oil lamp, and saw the jeweled weapons lying in heaps.

For a moment neither spoke. Then Lucy asked:

"An' you, dad. What brought you ter this place? Did yer know 'bout it?"

"Yes. I knew it wuz hyar. But I never saw it open afore, an' I didn't know who it belonged ter."

"How did they git yer down hyar, dad?"

"Why, I wuz poking 'bout on the platform outside, and tumbled in head-first."

"Well, can't yer help me outen this fix? I'm tied up ez if I wuz er racketty mustang," said Lucy.

"So am I."

"What! hev they got you in a hobble, too?"

"Of course they hev. D'ye suppose I'd hev let you stay thar 'ithout helpin' yer ef I wuz able ter come ter yer? Don't yer know yer old dad better'n that, Lucy?"

There was reproach in the old man's voice that touched Lucy at once.

"Yes, yes, dad. Uv course I know it. But we must get out uv this, somehow."

"Thet's so!"

The old man spoke in a peculiar tone, as if he were struggling bard with something.

"What are yer doing, dad?"

Silas answered only with a prodigious grunt.

"Seem ter be bevin' er tough time over something, dad," went on Lucy, who, with the carelessness of youth, could not keep down her spirits, in spite of her awful predicament.

A few more grunts and a prolonged "Ah-h-h!" from her father, stirred up her feminine curiosity to an almost unbearable pitch.

"What in thunder air yer doin', dad?"

For answer there was the sound of a rope switching against the wall of the cave, accompanied by the pecnliar snap—snap of a cord being drawn through a slip-knot.

What was Silas Laurent doing?

The reader will probably be almost as anxious as Lucy to know.

Although a helpless old idiot when drunk, Silas Laurent was a bright enough man when his senses were not clouded by liquor.

He had no notion of letting two such fellows as Jim Townley and Guerillo triumph over him if he could help it.

Therefore, no sooner had they departed, than he began to tug and strain at the rope that had been fastened to his wrists and passed around his body to make him doubly secure.

Had his captors neglected this precaution of fastening the rope around his body, he would have had more difficulty in getting loose. As it was, he soon felt the rope giving before his efforts, and when Lucy heard the rope swishing and snapping, he was practically free.

A moment more and the rope was in a loose coil in his hands, as he pushed aside the curtain and quickly released his daughter.

"Wal, Lucy, so far, good!" observed the old man, with a chuckle.

"Not so very good, dad. You needn't be snickering over it. We've got ter git out uv this hyar place afore they come back, or there'll be murder."

"Who'll be murdered?"

Lucy picked up a modern Colt's revolver from the heap of firearms at her feet, and showing her father that it was filled with cartridges, remarked, with unmistakable significance:

"Never mind, so long ez it isn't you or me!"

"Thet gal's er dandy, if she is my own daughter," muttered Silas to himself.

"Now, father, how air we goin' ter git out?"

"Waiter minute, Lucy, while I think. Let's try ther door first."

He went up the steps, and tried to push out the mass of roots and earth, but he could not make the least impression on them.

Then Lucy tried, with equal want of success.

"No use, Lucy. I didn't suppose ez we could find our way out thar. Them fellows is too cunning fer that. There is er secret 'bout that ther door that we can't hope ter find out right hyar. But we can try something else."

"What?"

"Wait an' you'll see."

He went to the very back of the cave, where Lucy had been concealed by the curtain, and standing on the rough bench that had served her for a seat, tapped at the roof with the butt of a richly-chased Spanish carbine that happened to be at hand, and that was part of the treasure stolen from his house."

"What are yer doin', dad?"

"Keep quiet, Lucy, and trust yer old father a little, will yer?"

"All right, dad. I only wanted ter make sure that yer warn't crazy."

Silas did not answer, for he had apparently found what he sought.

Among the soft earth and roots of which the roof of the cave was formed, there was a space, hard, like rock. This space Silas had just detected with the carbine that he had used in his prospecting.

"Lucy?"

"Wal?"

"Come hyar, by my side."

The girl sprung lightly upon the rough bench, and awaited further orders.

"See this bit av rock over my head?"

"Yes."

"Put your two hands ag'in'it, with me, an' shove ez hard ez yer kin."

The girl obeyed, putting all her strength against what she now saw, by the dim light of the oil lamp, was a perfectly clean slab of stone.

The old man assisted, and the result of their efforts was soon seen, to the surprise of the girl, if not of her father.

The whole slab gave way, and a hole just big enough for a man to squeeze through, was revealed.

"Why, dad, what is this?" asked Lucy.

"What did I tell yer? Didn't I say that I would find er way out?"

"But I don't understand—" said Lucy, in bewildered tones.

"Of course you don't. An' it's simple enough.

This hole leads inter er quiet little cave uv my own. Yer know thar is er big hill hyar, and it happens that Jim Townley and ther Mexican hev set up housekeepin' just under me. I only found cut their crib ther other day, an' ef I hadn't tumbled in accidentally ter-day when they wuz hyar, I should have come anyhow, ez soon ez they wera out. 'Cause I've bed my eye on 'em some time, an' I knew ez they wuz up ter some crooked business, especially that yaller-faced Mexican. I fixed this hyar slab ther other day, so ez I would bev an easy way inter their place, but—great snakes! I didn't expect ter use it for ther fu'st time ter git out, instead uv in."

While talking thus, the old man had not been idle.

He had brought over the table, and putting the stool upon it, was thus enabled to thrust his head and shoulders through the hole.

Then he struggled upward, his feet kicking convulsively, and warning Lucy to stand aside until her revered parent had got through, unless she wanted him to kick her brains out.

Silas struggled and squirmed, and bad made his way so far through the opening, that he had one knee on the floor of the apartment above, when a strong hand seized him by the throat, while another was clapped over his mouth, to prevent his making any outcry.

CHAPTER X.

HEADLONG INTO THE CANYON.

SILAS LAURENT struggled desperately in the hands of his secret foe, but he was utterly powerless.

He felt that the hands were soft, in spite of their iron strength, and he knew, therefore, that they did not belong to either Jim Townley or the Mexican.

In vain he tried to pierce the black darkness, to discover who this person could be that had forced his way into his secret chamber that he supposed was unknown to any one but himself.

He could not see anything, and he was as helpless as a baby.

Then there was the scratching of a match, and light.

"Well, well. Silas Laurent!" exclaimed a voice that he knew, and was very glad to hear, as Dude Grier was revealed by the light of the match he had in his hand.

"What?" exclaimed the man who held him, and who was a stylish-looking city chap, in a light overcoat, flashy necktie and standing white collar.

At the same time the hands were removed from his throat and mouth, so suddenly that the old man was in imminent danger of dropping through the hole again.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Laurent. Allow me to assist you," said the flashy chap, as he put his two hands under the old man's arms, and lifted him into the room as easily as if he were a baby.

"What in thunderation does this hyar mean?" demanded Silas, as he looked from one to the other.

"We must apologize for our intrusion," returned the stranger in the softest, politest accents, "but we were at your house, found things disturbed, and thought the wise thing was to come here."

"You knew about this hyar crib, then?"

"It seems so," smiled the stranger pleasantly.

"Hello, thar, dad. What's goin' on up thar?" cried a voice from below, just as the match in Dude Grier's fingers burned out and left the chamber in darkness again.

Dude Grier hastily lighted another match, and in obedience to a gesture from Silas lighted a candle that stood upon a rude table, stuck in the neck of an old beer bottle.

As he did so he saw the face of Lucy Laurent appear at the hole in the floor through which her father had just

the hole, and taking Lucy's hands drew her carefully through and led her to a stool with as much grace as if they had been in a ball-room.

Silas quickly replaced the slab, and shot two bolts so that it could not be removed from below.

"I left it that way in case of accidents, afore," he explained. "But it don't go now."

The room in which the party stood was almost a counterpart of that below, but there was no apparent outlet. The doorway, with the door of roots and earth, that was a part of the retreat of Jim Townley and Guerillo, was not to be seen in Silas Laurent's place. Neither, for that matter, was any other means of exit apparent.

"Mr. Laurent," said Robert Roberts, "as soon as the bustle attendant upon the arrival of Lucy and the closing of the trap had subsided, 'I want to make arrangements with you about a certain paper you hold.'

Silas Laurent's red face instantly became drawn in what he meant for a look of business shrewdness.

"What paper?"

In a few words Robert explained that he wanted to compare a paper he possessed with one he knew to be held by Silas Laurent, to the end that the ownership of certain missing property in Arizona could be established.

"Will yer let me see yours?" asked Silas.

"Certainly."

The Professor—as Robert still liked to be called—took out the pocketbook with which the reader has already some acquaintance, and opening it, felt for the paper.

One instant was enough to make the detective aware that he had been robbed, and his brain worked quickly enough for him to remember exactly when.

He did not make any outcry, however.

"I am sorry, Mr. Laurent, but I have left the paper in another pocket. But if you will allow me to see yours, I can tell you whether the paper you have is the one I want."

The old man's mouth and eyes were screwed up in a cunning leer.

"I hev been robbed uv nearly everything I hed that wuz uv any value, an' I guess ther paper must be gone too," he answered. "Howsumever when you bring your paper ter me p'raps I kin prevail on ther thieves ter give me back mine."

"Very well," answered the detective, without allowing the slightest sign of disappointment to escape him. "I will see you again. Shall you be here or at your regular home below?"

"I'm er goin' home. It's pretty late in the day now, an' I don't want ter stay hyar any longer. 'Sides, I'm er-going ter git ther boys ter help me ter git even with them thar two thieves, Townley and Guerillo."

"Let me help you, Silas," here put in Dude Grier. "I have a score to settle with those fellows myself, and this would be as good a time as any."

"Dude Grier, you git back ter yer bizness an' don't interfere with this hyar fuss," said Lucy, imperiously.

The girl had arisen from her seat, and was shaking her forefinger at the young man, with such effect that he quailed manifestly, before her.

The detective smiled knowingly at Dude over the girl's shoulder.

"But, why not, Lucy?" remonstrated Dude.

"Because I tell yer not. That should be enough."

Dude did not carry the discussion any further. He saw that it would be useless, because when Lucy made up her mind to a thing, she generally had her own way.

"Very well, then, gentlemen. I'll say good-evening ter yer, unless you'd like something ter drink afore you go."

"No thank you, Mr. Laurent," answered the detective. "Not now."

He walked to a corner of the cave where a short step-ladder leaned against the wall. Climbing to the top of this, he seemed to crawl actually through the wall, for no opening could be discerned by those below.

"He knows ther way out, jist ez sure ez he did ther way in," muttered Silas.

No sooner had he disappeared than Dude Grier, after an affectionate glance at Lucy, to which she responded with a coquettish toss of the head, followed him.

The mode of egress and ingress to Silas Laurent's cave was ingenious. A pile of brush stood in the corner of the cave in which the step-ladder was placed, so close that it covered a hole big enough for a man to crawl through.

Through this brush Bob and Grier had made their way, the twigs falling back into place of their own accord, thus hiding the opening and making it appear as if the men actually crawled through a solid wall.

When they were fairly outside the tunnel they found themselves in what they might have thought was a mere hole without an outlet had they not come in the same way, so that they knew better.

The tunnel twisted in various directions, now going ten feet one way, now two feet another, now up, now down.

It was close and hot, and Bob was seized with

a fit of sneezing, as dust got up his nose, stopping his own progress, and Dude's too.

"Hurry, Professor. There is no fun in this," said Dude.

"Patience, my boy, patience. My nose is full of dust and my clothes will be ruined, but I think the gain we shall make by all this trouble will repay us both."

"I hope so."

On they went, sometimes having room almost to stand upright, and again being forced to crawl, perfectly flat, but ever tending downward.

At last a glimmer of light was to be perceived in the distance, and soon Bob had reached the end of the tunnel, with his head in the outer air.

Now came the most difficult part of the journey. The opening was in the face of a cliff rising sheer from the valley below thousands of feet, being in fact part of the awful cleft in the mountain by which Townley had reached his cave with the aid of the fallen log and platform under it.

This opening was some distance from the platform, however, and was hidden by a sharp bend, so that any one going to and from Townley's retreat would be unable to see that of Silas Laurent.

Below the opening, some four feet, was a narrow ledge, not more than two feet wide, while cuts in the face of the cliff between the ledge and the entrance to the tunnel showed that those who entered it or left it must be prepared to hold to any slight thing that might afford them help.

Bob and Arthur Grier had made a mistake by entering the tunnel head-first. Had they gone in the other way, it would have been comparatively easy for them to let their feet down to the ledge and walk away.

Boston Bob saw all this at a glance.

"Looks ugly!" he muttered.

"What's the matter?" asked Dude.

"We've come the wrong way."

"Well?"

"There are one of two things to do. One is to go back till we find a place big enough to turn 'round in."

"Too far!" commented Dude, sententiously.

"The other is to crawl out and take our chances of a header into the canyon."

"Better risk it."

"I think so, too, Arthur. Here goes."

Bob let himself out of the hole little by little until he could reach two of the holes cut in the face of the cliff.

By this time he was a long way out of the hole, looking down into the awful chasm of which he could not see the bottom.

"Hold my ankles, Arthur," he said.

"I am."

"Yes, I know, but hold them tight."

"All right."

Bob let himself down again, and now he was practically standing on his head on the ledge, with his face at the extreme edge.

How was he to get his feet down in that narrow space without turning a somerset into space?

The detective soon solved the problem.

With another warning to Dude Grier to hold fast to his ankles, he walked along sideways on his hands, until he was so far from the opening that his companion could only just manage to hold him by the most persistent effort.

"Let her go, Arthur!"

The command was hardly necessary, for at this instant the young miner could not retain his hold on the ankles of his companion any longer, but was forced to drop them.

Bob's feet dropped with a crash, and the detective was lying at full length on the two-foot-wide ledge, thankful to find himself still alive.

It was a narrow escape, and Professor Roberts was aware of the fact.

"Now, Arthur," he said, as he regained his feet. "It's your turn."

It was not so difficult a matter to get Dude out. Bob braced himself firmly on the ledge, holding by one of the clefts in the rock, and pulled his young companion out bodily, steadyng him till he stood upside down on the ledge, and then placing him right side up in a most workmanlike manner.

Now began a portion of the journey as perilous as any through which they had passed.

The ledge wound along upward, sometimes sloping outward so that they could hardly keep their footing, and again becoming so narrow that there was hardly room for their feet.

But both men were young and active, and moreover had traveled over the path before, so that they knew exactly what they had to do.

The detective, in particular, seemed to be thoroughly familiar with every portion of the neighborhood, and indeed it was he that had led the way to this retreat of Silas Laurent's—a retreat that was unknown to any one else in the Gulch.

The two reached the top of the ledge at last, and found themselves on a path among the pines, that was evidently often traveled, judging by the way it was beaten out by footsteps.

As a matter of fact, it was the path by which Jim Townley and Guerillo had brought the pistols and guns from Laurent's house, and by which the old man himself was accustomed to

go to his claim up in the mountains that yielded so little, so far as the other miners in Hopeful Gulch could tell.

"Well, Arthur, here we are at last. Now, I think we had better go back to your place and hit upon a plan for getting that paper from our esteemed friend, Guerillo."

"Guerillo?"

"Yes. He managed to steal that paper. I don't know how he did it, but he did it. We know that he and Jim Townley have gone to Arch Morrow's place on a wild-goose chase, because they will find the man dead, and it isn't likely that Silas Laurent would let him have that paper if he was not."

"Ah!"

"Silas Laurent has one of the three papers that will establish the right of Lucy to that gold mine. Guerillo has another—the one he stole from me—and the other is—"

"Where?"

"That we still have to find out, although I begin to have a suspicion."

The Professor was standing under a huge pine, brushing himself with his pocket clothes-brush, and trying to make himself a little presentable, although the rough experience he had had in the tunnel made this by no means easy.

"What about Guerillo? You think the first thing to do is to make him give up the paper, I suppose?"

What The Professor would have replied cannot be told, for a heavy blow descended on the back of his head, just as a hand pushed Arthur Grier with irresistible force from behind, and sent him over the edge of the precipice—falling—falling—into space!

CHAPTER XI.

TWO RASCALS BAFFLED.

"THET settles him, I guess!" remarked Townley, as he turned away from the edge of the cliff, without looking over, and took hold of the detective's head in a business-like way, while the Mexican held his feet.

"Geet heem down to ze creeb, Jeem. Ve moost take heem now. He know too mooch."

"Let's throw him over hyar, after ther other feller, Guerillo."

"Caramba! No! Eet vould not keell him. You not know heem. He hava zee charmed life. Ve moost drive ze knife into heem over an' over. So! An' even zen he may not die. Oh, he ees ze devil. Diablo!"

There was no doubt about the Mexican's fear of the dudish fellow who called himself a Professor, but who was known to Chicago crooks, as well as the police of that city, as one of the boldest as well as keenest detectives west of the Alleghany Mountains.

Fifteen minutes later saw the two desperadoes carefully carrying the still unconscious detective into the cave, by means of the fallen log and platform over the canyon leading to their secret retreat.

The detective lay perfectly helpless in their arms, for the blow, administered with the butt-end of a heavy 44-caliber six-shooter, was calculated to knock the senses out of any one not possessing a wrought-iron skull.

They took him into the cave and closed the opening before doing anything else.

The oil lamp had burned out, and the place was in darkness.

"Ther old man's very quiet," muttered Townley. "Don't seem ter be even breathing."

The Mexican said nothing, but busied himself in filling and lighting the lamp, operations that he performed easily in the dark, knowing exactly where to place his hand on everything.

As the flickering gleam from the wick cast a feeble illumination upon everything in the neighborhood, Jim Townley looked hastily around him and a cry of dismay escaped him.

"Gone!" he gasped.

"Gone?" echoed the Mexican.

Townley sprung toward the curtain that had fallen into place again, and tearing it aside, saw that Lucy had disappeared, too.

For an instant the two desperadoes looked into each other's faces.

Then, with one accord they went to the doorway to see whether the secret fastenings, known only to themselves, had been tampered with.

"Never been teched eh, Guerillo? Isn't that what you say?" asked Townley, after a close examination of the mass of roots and earth that formed the door.

"Ees!"

"What d'yer make out uv it?"

"Caramba!"

"Oh, yes. Caramba is all right. But it don't prove anything."

"Caramba!" repeated the Mexican, whose dazed condition could only be relieved by this exclamation, apparently.

Jim Townley made a close inspection of the whole cave, moving the few articles of furniture, shaking out the curtain, as if he thought it possible that some one might be concealed in its folds, and turning over the heap of guns and pistols he and his companion had stolen from Silas Laurent.

"Gone, an' no way to 'count fer it," mused Jim, looking vacantly at his companion.

"Vill it be safe to leave zis fellow here?" asked

the Mexican, turning around to where they had thrown Robert Roberts.

"Perfectly safe," answered a mocking voice. Both turned quickly toward the sound, and both started in baffled surprise.

The detective was leaning coolly against the wall with a silver-mounted pistol in each hand, pointed carelessly at the head of Townley and Guerillo, while his forefingers toyed playfully with the triggers in a way that was anything but comfortable to the desperadoes.

"Sorry to disturb you, gentlemen, but I am compelled to hold the drop on you."

Townley moved as if he would dart forward.

"Hold up your hands!" came from the detective in a sharp tone of command, and up went Townley's hands as if some one had pulled a string.

The detective stood regarding the two men with a most exasperating smile on his face.

"Strange how easily I can fool you two fellows isn't it?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Caramba!" growled the Mexican.

"Cuss you!" hissed Townley, below his breath.

"Exactly. Cuss me all you please, my leetle-bred friend, but that does not alter the fact."

"Caramba!"

"As you very truly remark, Caramba! Whatever that may mean."

The detective was talking in an easy, good-natured way that was perfectly maddening to the two men who were looking down the muzzles of the silver-mounted revolvers.

"Now, Guerillo, turn out your pockets."

"V'at you mean, eh?"

"I mean that I want to see what you have in your pockets. That's all."

"Caramba!"

"Empty your pockets."

The Mexican scowled, but he knew that he must obey, with the steely glitter of those unfathomable blue eyes upon him, and that white finger playing on the trigger of the revolver.

Guerillo sullenly drew out a bowie-knife from the hip-pocket of his trowsers."

"Good! Throw it down."

The Mexican obeyed. Then he drew forth a revolver, and it was instantly kicked out of his hand by the toothpick shoe on the right foot of Robert.

"Excuse me," he said, politely. "But I thought it better for all parties not to waste any time, in case of accidents."

Robert saw that this was the only pistol the Mexican had carried, so he waited with perfect equanimity for him to take out the contents of his pockets.

There was a pocket-knife, some string, a few gold and silver coins, some poker chips, a small bag of gold-dust, and a pocketbook.

"Let me see what you have in that pocketbook," commanded the detective, hiding his eagerness to know its contents with a broader smile than ever.

The Mexican opened the pocketbook and spread the contents upon the table.

There were a deck of cards, some letters, a few business cards, and several greenbacks.

"That all?" asked Robert.

For answer, Guerillo held up the pocketbook, so that its interior could be plainly seen, every compartment being empty.

"Um! The rascal has it hidden somewhere," thought the detective.

He looked sharply at the two men, and his quick eye detected a momentary glance of triumph from the Mexican to Townley.

"Take off your shirt, Guerillo," he commanded, in a matter of fact way.

"Caramba!"

"Take it off."

Guerillo looked around him, as if seeking for some way out of his dilemma, but all he saw was the unrelenting, fair-haired young man, in stylish clothes, holding the two revolvers poised in his hands, ready to blow out the brains of either him or Townley, if they did not obey orders.

It was a ludicrous thing to see the burly Mexican pulling his blue shirt over his head, revealing an undershirt of finer material than one might have expected such a man to wear.

The blue shirt was tossed over to the detective, in obedience to his direction, and he looked at it closely as it lay on the floor, without taking his pistols down for an instant however. He knew the importance of keeping the two men covered.

Nothing in the blue shirt! A cursory examination convinced the experienced detective of that.

"Open that undershirt in front, Guerillo."

"Caramba!"

"Do as I tell you."

"Caramba! But I catch zee cold."

"You'll catch something hot if you don't do as you are told, right awav," was the significant rejoinder of Professor Roberts.

The Mexican looked around him again in that hunted way of his, and then, seeing no avenue of escape, reluctantly unbuttoned the front of the fine merino undershirt he wore.

The detective pounced upon him, and the next instant held aloft a closely-folded paper.

"Caramba!"

"You rascal!" exclaimed The Professor, with a cold smile.

"Zat ees my property. Why you take eet, eh?"

"It is not your property, my friend, and you know, as well as I, that you lie!"

"Vat eez eet?"

"It is a certain paper that you stole from us last night. What it is, matters nothing to you. I have it back now, and I shall know how to keep it this time."

"Wal, I dunno 'bout that, Mr. Professor, or whatever you call yerself!" growled Jim Townley, who had been watching the proceedings of Guerillo and the detective with an expression of profound disgust.

"There are many things you don't know about, Mr. Townley. But you will learn in time."

The Professor spoke with exasperating coolness, and backing away from the two desperadoes till he stood just inside the entrance, seated himself on the steps and placed one of his revolvers by his side, retaining the other, so that he could keep either of the men covered without shifting his position.

Then he drew forth his pocketbook from his inner pocket, and placing the precious paper within it, returned the pocketbook to its place.

"There we are, gentlemen. All compact and comfortable. Now, what shall I do with you? That is the question."

He leaned back, with a silver-mounted pistol in each hand, pointing them at the two men, considering as coolly and comfortably as if there were no desperate fellows before him, either of whom would have shut off his wind at a moment's notice, with the greatest of pleasure.

He knew what he meant to do eventually.

There were crimes against both of them of which he was cognizant, and although he might not have pressed them on that account, if he had found they were behaving themselves at Hopeful Gulch, the events of the two days had made him resolved to stop their capers for the future.

Where to put them for safety while he prosecuted his search for the papers that were to give Lucy Laurent her property, was a question not to be easily answered.

"I don't know, I am sure," he mused.

Just then his eye caught the heap of weapons stolen from Silas Laurent's house.

His eyes opened wider, and there seemed to be a strong fascination in the brilliant-jeweled guns and pistols lying in the corner of the gloomy cave.

"Well, well! I would swear to that collection anywhere. How did they come into this place?" he muttered, inaudibly.

Then he glanced at Guerillo's face, and a look of intelligence spread over his own.

"I see. They've cleaned out the house of the only man that could have had them here. The last time I saw these things they were in the vault at the bank in Chicago, where old Smail showed them to me. I see—I see."

The detective was musing deeply, but he did not relax his vigilance with regard to his two companions.

"Wonder what became of Arthur? I never saw him after we met those fellows. I wish he could find this place. It would relieve me from an awkward predicament."

He saw that he must settle the matter quickly, so he put his plan of action into effect without the loss of more time.

"Guerillo!"

"Ees!"

"Walk over to that corner," pointing with the pistol in his left hand.

The Mexican hesitated, but a glance into the resolute eye of the detective decided him.

He stood in a corner of the cave and waited for further orders.

"Stay right there."

"Ees!"

"Stir a step, on any pretense—I don't care what it is—and I'll blow your brains out without warning!" went on Robert, in as mild a tone as if he had been inviting the Mexican to dinner.

"Caramba!"

Guerillo could not resist the temptation to make use of his favorite oath, but he knew it would be as much as his life was worth to move.

"Townley!"

"Wal!" was the sulky response.

"Keep your hands up."

"I am, ain't I?"

Robert placed the revolver in his left hand in the scabbard on that side, and drew forth a pair of handcuffs, bright and glistening, that had been hidden in one of the tail-pockets of his stylish coat.

Townley started.

"What air yer goin' ter do with them things?" he demanded with an ugly scowl.

Robert did not think it worth while to reply, but he stepped toward the desperado with the evident determination of placing them upon his wrists.

Bang.

A bullet from the revolver was imbedded in the wall about two inches from the Mexican's ear.

"Guerillo, you moved!" said the detective, with a pleasant smile.

"Caramba! a trifle only."

"Yes, but I told you not to stir. The next time I fire I shall hit you. Now, Townley."

The Mexican evidently regarded this neatly-dressed Boston professor as something supernatural. It was actually ludicrous to see the big swarthy rascal carefully standing in exactly the same position, afraid to move a hair's breadth for fear of the mild pale-faced, light-haired dude from Boston.

Jim Townley stood with his hands over his head, as the detective pistol in one hand, and handcuffs in the other, approached him.

"Now, Townley!"

"Yer told me to keep my hands up, didn't yer? Wal, I'm doin' what ye said."

Robert smiled, and with a dexterous movement snapped one of the bracelets around Townley's right wrist, above his head, as it was.

"Wal, I'll be—" growled Townley.

"Handcuffed, eh? Yes; so you will," laughed the detective finishing the sentence for him, and catching his wrist with the other handcuff, so that he was helpless.

The detective stepped back in admiration of his own work, and fell against some one who had just come down the steps, noiselessly and unobserved.

"Silas Laurent?"

"Caramba!"

Silas Laurent smiled at these remarks of the detective and Mexican, and the smile became a broad grin when he saw how completely Robert had the two fellows in his power.

"Got 'em, eh?"

"Yes, and you must stay here and watch them."

"I'll do that."

"Very well. Are you heeled?"

"Yes, I've got plenty uv weapons in my crib, an' I've brought two pretty Smith & Wessons with me, besides this hyar toothpick."

The old man exhibited two formidable six-shooters, and a bowie-knife in his belt, and bestowed a threatening glance upon Townley and Guerillo.

"Shoot them down if they attempt any nonsense," admonished the detective, as he left the cave.

"I will!" answered Silas, settling himself comfortably on the steps with revolvers ready for instant action.

CHAPTER XII.

OVER THE DEATH CANYON.

WHEN Dude Grier felt himself going over the edge of the precipice he made up his mind, like a flash, that his last moment had come.

The sensation of utter helplessness, as for a second he balanced on the extreme edge of the cliff, wildly clutching at the air, had hardly time to be felt, before he was going down headlong.

Naturally, he closed his eyes.

It seems as if Nature provides that, at times of great peril, human beings should involuntarily shut out from themselves the awful circumstances they cannot avoid.

Arthur Grier was not a coward, but the horror that ran through his frame as he pitched forward, was as keen as if he had been the most timid creature in existence.

Then, even as he fell, there was a frightful shock, and he was unconscious.

"Wal, durn my picter, ef this hyar ain't er pleasant thing!"

The voice was that of a woman, and if Dude Grier could have heard it, he would have known at once that it was the voice of Lucy Laurent.

"Dude Grier, ez sure ez shootin'! Wal, Dude, you're lucky, or thar wouldn't be enough uv yer to hold a funeral over!"

Lucy Laurent was standing on a narrow ledge just below the entrance of her father's cave, and was looking over it at something some distance below.

The something was the unconscious form of Arthur Grier, caught in a bush growing from the face of the chasm, and fortunately strong enough to support his weight.

The ledge by which it was necessary to go to and from Silas Laurent's cave wound about the face of the mountain in such a way that Dude Grier had been thrown over the precipice at a spot exactly over the doorway of the cave.

He had had a narrow escape from instant death, and even now it was by no means certain that he could be saved.

"I don't know 'zactly what ter do," said Lucy to herself. "Hyar is dad gone out an' I'm all alone. But—I'm goin' ter git that feller out uv his scrape some way, or I'll go over with him. Sure ez my name is Lucy Laurent."

She kneeled down on the narrow ledge and looked over into space. Had she not been used to these dizzy heights she could hardly have balanced herself on this small space, and looked into a fathomless chasm with impunity.

She saw that there was blood on the young man's face, which was upturned, and noticed that his lips were moving slightly, as if he was trying to speak.

"Yes. I know what's ther matter," said Lucy, in a satisfied tone. "He knocked his head ag'in' that spur ov rock, an' now he's comin' ter himself. Wal, ef he ever gits so ez he kin do

anything fer himself, guess it won't be much trouble ter git him up hyar."

Arthur Grier opened his eyes and looked full into hers. Then he closed them.

"Gosh! What's ther feller doin', I wonder? He must think ez that is er thunderin' good place ter go ter sleep. Thar! He's openin' 'em ag'in. Now he's shuttin' 'em. Durn it! What shall I do?"

"Lucy!"

"Hello! Who called me?"

She looked around and above her, hundreds of feet, where the sharp edge of the cliff was clearly defined against the blue sky.

Not a soul was in sight.

"Thet's funny! Some one called me, I'll sw'ar!"

She gazed down into the face of Arthur Grier. But the young man had evidently relapsed into unconsciousness ag'in.

"No; it couldn't bev been him. He's gone fer ther present, poor kid!"

Arthur Grier was some years older than Lucy, but she was accustomed to being at the head of everything and everybody, and any young man of anywhere near her own ago was a "kid" to her.

"Wal! I've got ter do somethin'. I don't purpose ter let er white squar' feller like Dude Grier die right under my nose."

She had been looking carefully at the face of the cliff, straight down and on both sides.

It looked rather hopeless, but Lucy had plenty of confidence in herself, and she was sure that she would find some way of saving the young man from an awful death.

"Aha! I think I see er way out uv this, ef he don't wake up an' go ter kickin' around, so ez ter spile ther whole scheme!" she muttered.

She had noticed a strong pine jist below the ledge on the right, and two others some distance lower. Then there was a ledge not more than a foot wide, running from these two trees to that on which rested the limp body of Dude Grier.

The plan she hastily formed was a dangerous one, but she did not hesitate.

"I must go back inter ther cave for some rope," she said, anxiously, as she kept her eye on Grier.

Her great fear was that he might revive during her absence, and before he realized his position, make a movement that would result in his falling from his frail support to the sharp rocks and rushing torrent that was almost invisible from the ledge whereon stood Lucy Laurent.

"Wal, I'll bev ter chance it, that's all!" Then bending over the brink, she called, sharply: "Dude!"

A slight trembling of the lips seemed to indicate that he heard her.

"Dude! Dude—dear!"

The girl blushed as she addressed this loving epithet to one whom she was in the habit of tormenting, with pretended indifference. But a defiant look came into her eyes, and she repeated more distinctly:

"Dude, dear!"

There was no mistake about it now. The lips trembled and parted, and the eyes opened.

"Dude, dear!"

A murmur that would have been indistinguishable to any one save an instant listener:

"Yes, Lucy!"

"Do you know whar yer are?"

"Yes."

"You know me?"

"Yes."

"Kin yer keep quite still fer ten minutes longer, an' trust me?"

"Yes, Lucy."

"Good! You're er trump, Dude."

A slight smile overspread the features of the young man, and his right arm, that hung loosely over a limb of the tree, moved slightly.

"Hold on, Dude!" almost screamed Lucy. "Don't move yer arm! Don't move yerself at all."

The young man smiled in token that he understood her.

"Now I'm goin', Dude—goin' ter git some rope. I'll be back in about ten minutes."

Arthur Grier murmured: "Yes, Lucy."

"Wal, now. Keep quiet. I may want yer exert yerself when I git back, so save yer strength."

"Yes."

"Is yer head hurt bad?" asked the girl, anxiously, looking over the cliff again after she had disappeared.

"Not very."

Arthur Grier was getting clearer every moment now, and although he was not himself, he could speak in rather louder tones than when he first found himself able to answer Lucy's questions at all.

"All right, Dude; be good to yerself for ten minutes," cried the girl as she disappeared from his view, and made her way into the cave by the tunnel through which Arthur Grier and Robert Roberts had reached outer air not long before.

Arthur Grier lay still, and as the confusion caused by the blow on his head was gradually dispelled, he tried to realize where he was.

That he had been saved from an awful death

in some almost miraculous way he knew, but he could not tell where he was, nor how soon he might find himself plunging headlong into the canyon.

All that remained for him was to obey Lucy and lie quite still until she returned.

"And she called me 'Dude, dear!' he thought. "Well, well! If I get out of this fix, I shall always feel better hereafter."

Although Arthur Grier was lying on a bush growing out from a precipice, which might give way at any moment, and although his life then actually hung upon a twig, he would not have changed places with any other man in the world, such is the power of love.

"It would be too bad if this thing were to break down with me," he thought. "However, I must hope for the best. I want to hang on, if it is only to get even with that rascal, Jim Townley."

Arthur Grier's thoughts wandered off to the different stirring events of the last two days, and he thought of Bess Morrow in jail for the murder of her father in spite of the conviction of every one in camp that she was innocent. Then he wondered whether Mat Clark had anything to do with the crime, and whether it would not be a good plan to hang him off-hand on suspicion, anyhow.

"Wonder where that Professor is?" was his next thought. "He's a queer fellow. Well, if he finds those papers and gives Lucy her fortune, he will have done such a good thing that I shall be more glad than ever that I was able to prevent him being sand-bagged in Chicago."

At this point in his meditations Arthur moved ever so slightly, as a sharp twig ran into his back.

There was an ominous crack, and the limb that bore most of his weight sunk several inches and seemed to be still going down.

The cold perspiration burst out on the young man's forehead. He dared not make any attempt to save himself.

A false movement might result in his being hurled into space!

All that remained for him was to lie still and trust to Providence.

"Down, down! It seemed like an eternity to Arthur Grier that he felt himself sinking, although actually it was only a few seconds.

Then the sinking ceased and he knew that what he feared had not taken place. The limb was still firm, and the crack he had heard was only that of another limb than that upon which he was lyng.

He breathed a silent, but fervent prayer of thankfulness, and closed his eyes. He was very weak, and the few moments of suspense had made him feel faint and sick.

"Dude!" He opened his eyes with a start.

"Lucy!" "Thet's what, Dude! Look out!"

"What shall I do?" "Don't do nothin' till I tell yer!"

Lucy Laurent's grammar was a rather uncertain quantity, but her heart was in the right place.

Dude Grier trusted her implicitly, and lay waiting for her next proceeding.

Lucy was going about her work in a matter-of-fact, business-like way peculiar to her.

From her father's cave she had brought a hatchet and two spikes, each about eight inches in length and stout in proportion.

These spikes she drove into the solid rock close together, with repeated blows of the hatchet.

It required considerable strength and skill, but Lucy accomplished her task in a much shorter time than might have been expected.

She tugged at the spikes when she had them driven into the rock, and satisfied herself that it would take tremendous power to dislodge them.

She looked over at Arthur, and saw that he was lying perfectly still, looking upward.

With a dexterity, partly natural, and partly acquired in her mountain life, Lucy fastened the end of a strong three-quarter-inch rope to the two spikes, and tested its strength by a hand pull.

"Thet'll do, I guess," she observed to herself. "Ef dude only hez ther strength to climb et."

She threw the rope over the edge of the cliff, so that the end of it lay on Arthur Grier's breast.

"Take hold uv ther rope an' twist it 'round yer, Dude. But move careful."

It was unnecessary to give this warning. The young man knew that his life depended upon his caution.

He slowly and cautiously moved his right arm, and passed three or four coils of the rope around it, until it was almost taut.

"How is that, Dude? Kin yer come up ther way, d'yer think?"

"No. It ought to be around my waist. I'm afraid I could never hold myself by my arm. I hurt it when I fell, and it burns now," answered Arthur Grier.

"Let go the rope," commanded Lucy.

Arthur untwisted the line from his arm, and the girl drew it up again.

"We've got ter git yer out uv ther, Dude Grier. Ther only question is, how it is ter be

done," she said, philosophically, as she made a slip-knot in the loose end of the line, and arranged a large running loop.

She threw it over the edge of the precipice again, with a warning to Arthur to look out!

He saw at once what was her intention, but was by no means certain that he could do his part.

"Try an' git that loop over yer head, but mind yer don't slip jist when it's 'round yer neck. We don't want ter hang yer like er hoss-thief!"

"All right, Lucy!"

He seized the loop in his right hand and put it over his head, slipping his right arm through it. Then he tried to get his left arm through.

This was not so easy. He had the loop half-way down his arm, when there was a loud crash, and Arthur Grier was hanging over space, some 4 000 feet from the raging torrent swirling over the great sharp boulders at the bottom of the chasm.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVED BY PLUCK AND LUCK.

BACKWARD and forward swung Arthur Grier over the great canyon, helpless as a baby.

He knocked against the front of the cliff over and over again, but except that he put out his right hand to try and keep himself off the sharp edges of the rocks, he could not control his movements in the least degree.

"Dude! Dude!" came in agonized tones from above, as Lucy's pale face appeared over the edge.

"Yes, Lucy. All right!" answered Grier, cheerily.

"Kin yer climb up, d'yer think?"

The young man's answer was a shake of the head.

He was held in such a position that he could not use his left hand without loosening the noose and thereby risking it's slipping off and dropping him into the canyon.

Lucy saw this even as she asked the young man the question, and she realized that something else must be done.

She had already made note of the bushes that grew from the face of the cliff, and had seen what she believed might be a way to help the young man for whom she would be willing to risk her life.

"Stop swingin', Dude, ef yer kin," she cried. "I'm a-comin' down ter yer."

The young man did not reply, but he glanced up at her in a way that told her he appreciated her devotion.

Lucy Laurent was accustomed to climbing. For the years that she had been living in Arizona she had had to struggle up and down steep mountain-sides, and she prided herself on being able to hold on to anything.

The pine growing just below the path on the right, referred to in the last chapter, was the object to which she directed her attention primarily. She let herself down into the tree, and like a cat dropped below it, holding tightly to two of its strong limbs.

She felt with her feet for the other two bushes, but they were too low. They were out of her reach.

"Wal, this is er nice state uv things," she muttered.

Arthur Grier was watching her anxiously, but he did not speak. He could hardly have made his voice heard, and if he could, what was there to say? He held his breath in horror and waited. The cord was cutting deeply into his left arm, and as it had been bruised in the course of his fall, the pain was excruciating.

Lucy Laurent was not wanting in courage, but it required all she had to enable her to do the next thing that she considered necessary under the circumstances.

"Here goes, Lucy!" she exclaimed to herself. "In another minute you'll know whether yer time hez come or not."

She straightened herself so that her feet hung over the two bushes, but about eighteen inches above them. *Suddenly she let go!*

Like a dart she went down, crashing through the bushes, apparently on her way to the bottom of the canyon. Just as she had made up her mind that she had taken too many chances, she managed to stop herself, although her clothes were badly torn in the operation.

She was now on a level with Arthur Grier, although a little distance from him.

She saw that his face was pale, and that his eyes had closed again.

"Gone out uv his mind ag'in. Wal, he's a good boy in general. He must be hurt, or he wouldn't keel over that thar way. Wonder ef he's broke his arm. Hope not, anyway."

She placed her feet on the foot-wide ledge, and grasping the jagged points of rock as she moved along, made her way slowly toward the young man.

"Arthur!"

It was not often that she called him anything but "Dude," but she was highly strung just now, and her voice seemed hardly to be within her control.

He did not hear her. The pain of his sore arm, and the exertion he had undergone, had made him faint, and he was hanging in the noose limp and helpless.

"Now, what am I ter do?" she said to herself, as she steadied herself by the wall, and held the rope on which the young man was hanging.

She pushed and pulled the rope until it was swinging gently.

Dude Grier's feet were below the ledge, and the object of the girl was to get them upon it, so that he could be partly supported by it.

The young man could not do anything to help himself, and Lucy found herself with all the work on her own hands.

Fortunately, she had plenty of muscle concealed beneath her white flesh, and her strength was greater than most men of her weight possessed.

How she did it she never could have told, but somehow she managed to get Grier's feet on the ledge, and then, by an almost superhuman effort, drew him toward the face of the cliff.

Fortunately, Dude partly revived at this moment, and was able to stand up with the assistance of the girl. It was only for an instant, but that was long enough for Lucy to get the loop over his left arm and around his waist.

Just as she accomplished this feat Arthur swung from the ledge again, and once more hung supinely over the chasm.

"So far, good!" remarked Lucy. "But now, how am I to get back?"

Carefully and slowly she made her way back to the two bushes, and looked up to the strong pine from which she had dropped.

If it was a difficult thing to get down, the getting back seemed impossible.

"Wal, Lucy Laurent, you've got yerself interer nice fix, ain't yer? I b'lieve ez you air er bigger fool than yer ever thought yer wuz."

And truly, she was in a bad predicament. Without help it seemed impossible for her to reach the path above her, and there was no likelihood of any help coming that way.

"Now, how shall I get out of this?"

Lucy puckered her brows and tried to think what she could possibly do. But she shook her head in utter despair as she looked around her and thoroughly comprehended the dilemma she was in.

"I'm sorry fer Dude, too. I thought I wuz goin' ter git him out ov the hole, an' now I've made it worse by gittin' whar I can't do anything. Wal, wal!—I—What's thet up there?"

The last sentence was uttered loudly and emphatically. Lucy had seen something.

"Haloo!" she cried.

"Haloo!" came back the answer in a man's voice from above.

"Who's that?"

"The Professor."

"Wal, Professor, lend us a hand, will yer?"

She could see a face, pale, and decorated with a slight mustache, looking over the precipice, while a stylish derby hat crowned the light hair that was combed down over the brow.

"Ther Professor, ez sure ez shootin'! Ther same feller with ther dude clothes, ez wuz in dad's crib. Still he's er good feller, and I'm mighty glad ter see him."

Making these comments inaudibly, Lucy was looking curiously up into the pale face that wore such an earnest, anxious expression.

"You are in rather an awkward place, eh?" observed The Professor, coolly.

"Rather!"

"Arthur Grier is in bad shape, too. But I shall have to get you up before I can help him. It will take main strength to bring him up, and I can't do it myself without fraying the rope on the edge of the rocks."

"Professor," said Lucy.

"Well!"

"Stop gassing—"

"Eh?"

"I say stop gassing, and get down ter biz-ness."

"I will."

"Thet's what we want."

"Look out. I'm coming down."

"Ther deuce you air!"

The detective did not answer in words, but Lucy saw that he was indeed coming down, for his feet were already on the strong pine over her head.

The pine shook violently with the weight of the detective, but it was too strong to be seriously affected by his movements.

"I guess this will bear me all right, eh?" he asked, looking down.

"You bet yer."

"All right."

He let himself down, with two limbs of the tree under his arms, and his feet and legs were right before the girl so that she could put her arms around them.

She understood that this was what she had to do, and she did it without unnecessary hesitation.

"Let one of my legs go, and hold to the other," he exclaimed. "I can't move while you have them both."

Lucy obeyed, and the detective, exerting all his strength, raised himself, by bracing his free foot against the rocks and pulling at the limbs of the pine. It was a dead pull, but he did it.

Lucy held tightly to his leg, and as he raised her slowly from the two bushes that had been

supporting her, she kept her loose hand ready to clutch the limb of the pine above her so soon as she should reach it.

Gradually but surely she approached it, and just as it seemed to the detective as if he could not sustain the weight another second, she had one of the limbs of the pine in her grasp.

To release the detective's leg and take hold of the tree with both hands was the work of an instant.

"Wal, Professor, we made it!"

"Yes—easily," was his dry response.

"I dunno 'bout that."

"Don't you? I thought perhaps you were afraid I might drop my leg out of its socket."

"No, sir, I knew ez soon ez I see yer, ez you wuz er game man, an' I knew you'd play fair an' square, ef it took er leg."

The girl spoke earnestly, and it was evident to Dan that she did not take his words in anything but a serious sense.

"I try to be square," he replied, simply.

"Yes, Professor. It's er pity you're such er fool 'bout yer dress. You ought ter dress like ther boys uv ther Gulch. You'd be ez good er man ez ther best uv them, I believe," went on Lucy, in her blunt fashion.

"Thanks! Hadn't we better see about getting out of this, so that we can help Arthur Grier?"

"Yes, you're right, Professor. Poor Dude!"

The detective sprung to the top of the pine, so that he could clutch the edge of the cliff, and with a good spring, reach the two-foot-wide path.

As he knelt upon the path and looked over, he seemed to realize for the first time what an awful chasm it was over which he and this young girl had been performing gymnastic feats.

He lay flat on the path and reached over to Lucy.

She had already gained a position on top of the pine, and it was an easy task for her with Dan's assistance, to get to the path upon which he lay.

"Now, Professor, let's git Dude out uv his fix. He must be nearly cut in two by that thar rope around his waist."

"Very well. I'm ready. Poor fellow! I was afraid he was gone when I saw him lying on that bush below there."

"When did you see him?" asked Lucy, in surprise.

"About half an hour ago. I was on top of the mountain, away up over your head, and I saw both you and him. So I just called to you by your name, which I had heard your father use—and then I made my way around here, just in time to be able to tender some slight assistance to you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lucy, as a light broke upon her. "Then it wuz you ez I heard call Lucy when I couldn't make out whar ther voice come from?"

"I guess it was."

"Wal, help me to pull on this hyar rope," she said, changing the subject with a suddenness and rapidity peculiar to herself.

The detective did as he was commanded.

He seized the rope at the end of which Arthur Grier was suspended, and with the assistance of Lucy soon had him level with the ledge.

This did not end the trouble, however.

The young man was still unconscious and could not render any assistance.

"Kin you hold him this hyar way while I twist the other end of the rope around ther spikes?" asked Lucy, whose quick wit told her on the instant what would have to be done.

"I'll try."

"Tain't no use tryin' unless you air sure. 'Cause ef you ever let ther line slip it 'd probably be good-by ter Dude Grier, an' don't yer fergit it."

"I can hold it!" answered the detective, quietly.

He took an extra hold upon the rope, and Lucy let go, cautiously, and ready to seize it at once if she saw that it was too much for him.

"It's all right. I guess you hev'er good deal uv strength in them white hands uv yourn," observed Lucy, admiringly, as she rapidly threw the slack of the rope around and around the spikes.

"Thet's solid," she cried, at last. "Now, let's git this boy onto the ledge."

It required careful manipulation, but they accomplished it at last, and as the setting sun cast a red glow over the rough face of the mountain, making the blackness of the chasm look blacker than ever, its warm rays fell across the grateful face of Arthur Grier, as he pressed the hand of the girl, and arrested it for a moment in its task of wiping the blood from his face and putting some strong smelling-salts under his nose to drive away the last suspicion of faintness.

"How d'yer feel now, Dude?"

"All right, Lucy. Nearly as well as usual."

"So he should, with such a careful and devoted nurse," added the detective, looking down with a smile. "And I think we had better get out of this awkward place before dark."

"You're right, Professor. Now, Dude, get er move on," commanded Lucy.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAT CLARK SEES A GHOST.

MAT CLARK went back to the saloon of the late Arch Morrow after placing Bess in her prison.

He found that the remains of the dead man had been placed in Bess's own room, and that a coffin had already been made by the regular carpenter of Hopeful Gulch, a taciturn German, who would build you a house, a table, a wash-board or a coffin with equal facility, and never express any curiosity as to what you intended to do with them.

"Hello, Mat!" was the greeting of 'Squire Caldwell, as he came from behind the bar. "I app'int you ter take charge uv this hyar bizness till ther estate is settled, which kin hardly be till after ther trial."

"Very well, 'squire."

Mat Clark looked about the room in a furtive way, and saw that he and the 'squire were alone. Then he went on:

"Say, 'squire, I've been thinkin' 'bout this hyar killin', an' d'yer know I think ez p'raps I wuz mistook 'bout Bess."

"How?"

"Wal, I see her bendin' over him, ter be sure, but I think mebbe he did drive that knife inter himself arter all, an' p'raps she wuz only lookin' at him, and kind uv wailin' over him, don't yer see?"

'Squire Caldwell had been drinking so much that it was doubtful whether he could see anything very plainly. However, he nodded his head profoundly, and without another word to Mat Clark, nodded himself out of the house and up the street toward his own residence, in an upper chamber of which Bess Morrow was a prisoner.

Mat Clark bowed politely to the 'squire as he left the house, and stood at the door watching that noble representative of the law zig-zagging up the street.

"Think ye'r smart, don't yer?" he sneered after the retreating form of the dignified 'squire. "Think yer kin find out all 'bout things by just holdin' an' inquest, don't yer?"

There was a very ugly smile around the lantern-jaws of Mat, as he turned into the store and closed the outer door.

This was the day of the funeral, and it suited his purpose to observe the occasion by suspending business, notwithstanding that the arrangement did not suit the miners of Hopeful Gulch.

In the course of the afternoon the primitive ceremonies attendant upon a funeral in the Gulch took place, and Arch Morrow was quietly buried in the little graveyard a short distance up the mountain. The only mourner being poor Bess, who watched the lowering of her father's coffin into the grave from the window of her prison, that overlooked the cemetery.

"So! That's ther end of Arch Morrow," was the satisfied reflection of Mat, as the procession disappeared around the bend of the road. "I don't know how long it will be safe fer me ter stay in these hyar parts, however. Thet gal, Bess, is er determined critter, an' she might make it almighty dangerous fer me ef she got ugly."

He walked up and down the saloon, with his eyes bent upon the floor, in deep cogitation, occasionally extending his walk into the bedroom that had belonged to the young woman who was charged with her father's murder, and again stepping into the little kitchen by its side.

He was in anything but an enviable frame of mind.

True, he had secured the paper he wanted, and he had no doubt that Guerillo and Jim Townley would be able to get the others. Then, they could either doctor up the papers so that they could claim the property so rich with gold, or make a bargain with Lucy and her father that would make them all rich without any labor or risk.

For hours he strode up and down, alone, wondering what would be the best thing to do next.

Suddenly he noticed that it had become dark, and that the gloom of night had filled the big, empty saloon with queer shadows that to his imagination appeared to be grotesque human beings, mouthing and mocking at him.

He leaned against the bar and looked over toward the corner in which he had seen the body of Arch Morrow lying so short a time before.

Try as he would, he could not turn his eyes another way. There was a horrible but irresistible fascination that compelled him to watch the moving, impalpable shapes peopling the dark corner and threatening him in their ghostly way.

By some accident of light and shadow, there appeared to be one creature standing bolt upright in the slight opening of the doorway of Bess Morrow's bedroom.

The thing, whatever it was, seemed to be wagging its great head at him, and he could almost have sworn that he saw its fleshless face twist into strange contortions, as the rows of teeth opened and closed in a ghastly grin.

Mat Clark tried to move. He was rooted to the floor, and although he tried to remember, in a vague way, that he had revolvers and a bowie-knife in his belt, he could not have used them now if his life had depended upon prompt action.

"What can it be?" he thought, but his dry lips refused to shape the words, although it seemed to him that he had asked the question in trumpet tones.

He felt as if he were going out of his mind.

The shape was growing apparently, for Mat believed it was a great deal larger than when he had first gazed upon it, in its gaunt ugliness.

His heart was thumping away as if it would burst through his ribs, and he was in such an agony of mortal fear that it seemed as if something must give way.

His yellow face blanched, and his lantern jaws dropped. He was absolutely paralyzed with supernatural terror.

"Ah! What was that?"

He saw the shape move out of the corner and come toward him.

He tried to control himself to prevent his mind leaving him, and made himself believe that he was only the victim of a hallucination.

He could not doubt what he saw.

There could be no doubt about the movement of the thing, whatever it was.

It had become much darker, but the reflected light from a very hazy new moon made just enough light for him to follow the vagaries of what he was sure now was the spirit of the man that had been buried that afternoon.

Nearer and nearer came the *something*.

Mat Clark felt as if he would have given his life to be able to shout, so as to break the spell that held him and perhaps bring some one to his assistance.

Still, on came the shadow, nearer and nearer, and the trembling wretch could not make the least voluntary motion.

The strange visitant was now clearly defined to Clark's eyes, as it approached him, and he saw that it was in the form of a human being, in some sort of long robe, and with its head covered so that all of its face visible was a pale forehead, and two eyes that blazed in the gloom as if they were the windows of a furnace.

Nearer and nearer!

It was so close to him now that he could almost have touched it.

"Ah! One of its long arms was being slowly extended toward him and the fingers were about to seize him by the throat!

With a loud shriek, Mat Clark sunk to the floor unconscious, just as a cold hand touched him.

He was brought to himself by a hearty kick that could hardly have been applied by a ghost.

Groveling on the floor, as he was, he glanced upward and saw—the ghost.

But his fear changed from that of a supernatural character to a timidity born of a wholesome respect for the individual he had mistaken for a spirit.

The ghost was Bess Morrow.

"You mean, crawling scoundrel!" she ejaculated, as she bestowed another kick upon Mat that made his ribs ache. "Git up!"

Slowly and cautiously he obeyed.

"Now light er lamp!"

With one eye on his visitor, he brought a lamp from a shelf, lighted it and placed it on the counter.

Bess Morrow removed the white shawl from her head, straightened her dress, placed her arms akimbo, and looked at him.

"Ain't you er pretty specimen, don't yer think, you skunk?"

Mat did not answer. He had nothing to say.

"Why don't yer ask me how I come hyar? Didn't yer leave me fastened up in ther room in old 'Squire Caldwell's house, and oughtn't I ter be thar now?"

She spoke in a tone of ineffable contempt, as she looked closely into the yellow face of the man before her.

He mumbled something, but she struck his weazened cheek with her open hand, and his crooked teeth rattled ominously.

"What's ther use uv my asking you anything? You hev not ther courage uv er coyote, or ye'd never hev let me come in hyar an' scare ther life out uv yer so easily."

"But—Bess—" began Mat Clark, imploringly.

"Shet up, yer white-livered rascal. Don't dare ter talk ter me. An' you talked about lovin' me!"

Bess Morrow was a strong young woman, and under the influence of anger or other excitement she could throw any man in camp on his back and keep him there if she cared to do so.

She took Mat Clark by the two shoulders at this juncture, and shook him backward and forward perhaps a score of times, knocking his head against the bar at every shake, and almost dislocating his neck, as she forced his head down and backward.

"Wh—wh—what—do—yer—want—Bess! T—tell me—au—I'll—do—it!" stammered the wretched Clark.

The girl gave him one mighty shove that threw him off his feet, flat upon the floor, and then she put her foot upon his chest with such force that it squeezed nearly all the breath out of his body that had not been expelled by the shaking.

"Lie still!" she commanded.

"I will."

"You'd better!"

She stooped and took his pistols and knife from him, placing the weapons in a capacious pocket in her dress skirt.

"I may need these," she remarked, grimly.

"Bess, let me git up."

"Lie whar yer are," was her stern response. She tore open his coat, in spite of his feeble protest, and took out his pocketbook.

"That's nothing particular in thar, Bess. Only a few greenbacks an' some old leases an' things uv no use ter nobody but ther owner," whined Mat, as he kept a sharp eye on the girl's proceedings.

Bess's only reply was a sharp kick in his ribs that caused him to groan, as she opened the pocketbook upon the bar and examined its contents by the dim light of the lamp.

"Bess, yer wouldn't steal my money an' papers, would yer?" remonstrated Mat.

She looked at him with blazing eyes, and raised her foot as if she would bestow another kick upon him. She seemed to change her mind, however, for she put her foot down, and returned to her task of examining the papers.

"I wonder what it wuz ther rascal took," she muttered. "He grabbed something out uv my poor dad's box, I know, but I can't tell what it wuz."

She looked down at the cowering fellow at her feet, whose black eyes were fixed upon her face, but shook her head as a thought crossed her mind, and was instantly dismissed.

"It's no use. He wouldn't tell me. It 'u'd be givin' himself away," she mused.

She turned out the contents of his pocket-book on the counter, and looked them over hastily.

A dirty paper, that was almost worn through at the folds, attracted her particularly. It seemed, somehow, to be familiar, although she could not tell exactly why.

She spread it out, and saw that it was a map, with various lines and black blotches, denoting mines and silver lodes, such as she had seen in such papers before.

"This means something, sure, ef I could only tell what. 'Um! Hvar's some writing in ther corner. It's something about a gold mine in Yuma county, Arizona. But I can't make it out altogether."

She looked at Mat again, and saw that he was watching her with rapt attention. That decided her. She felt sure that she had taken the paper he had stolen from her father.

She replaced the other papers in the pocket-book, but kept the map.

"Now, Mat, I've got er witness that you murdered my father, an' it will depend upon yerself whether you hang fer it or not."

"How?"

"I want yer to go up ter the 'squire's house and tell him that yer wuz mistaken 'bout me, an' that yer let me out on yer own responsibility."

"But—but—that wouldn't be 'cordin' ter law!" objected Nat.

"Law? What hez law ter do with it?" was Bess Morrow's contemptuous reply. "Did law hev anything ter do with me bein' put in that room up thar? Ef I hadn't known ez I could easily hev got out, I'd never hev let yer put me in. Will yer do ez I tell yer?"

"Yes," said Mat, sullenly.

"Wal, git up then, and git out!"

He arose to his feet and shook himself.

"Git out, did yer say?"

"That's what I said."

With a look of malevolence that he could not repress, but that he dared not back up by words of defiance, he walked slowly toward the door, which Bess opened for him and then, when he was outside, closed with a bang.

CHAPTER XV.

A STILL HUNT AND A BATTLE.

As soon as she had got rid of Mat Clark, Bess went all over the house to make sure that she was alone.

Her own bedroom, the kitchen, the large saloon—the principal apartment—and the loft wherein Mat Clark had sometimes been allowed to sleep, were examined in turn.

"The house is empty now, anyhow. I've fastened ther window in my bedroom, so ez no one else kin come in ther way I come. I knew 'bout that window, an' it wuz easy enough fer me ter come in. But I don't propose ter let any one else do it."

She took the paper from her bosom and looked it over carefully.

"I believe this hyar is somethin' ter do with that property ez I've heerd Silas Laurent talk about when he wuz drunk sometimes—the property ez will belong ter Lucy when they kin find it."

She examined the map again and studied the directions written in the corner.

"Tain't no use. I can't make nothin' uv it. All the same, I know it means somethin'. That's only one thing ter be done, an' I'll do it without wastin' any more time."

Bess Morrow was a young woman of quick movements.

In five minutes she was outside the house, with the key in her pocket and her white shawl over

her head, looking about to see whether any one was around.

But the street was perfectly quiet. The miners were in their cabins, for they did not feel inclined to come down to Arch Morrow's place to-night, after the solemnity of the inquest and the funeral, even had they thought his saloon would be open. But they did not expect it to be open, so that they had double reason for not coming down.

"Wal, I hev ter myself, I see."

Bess looked around her in a satisfied way, for there was no one to be seen, and she felt secure in her assumption that her movements were unwatched.

She walked swiftly up the road in the shadow of the trees that grew here and there, and that had not been disturbed by the miners, save when they had cut one down at intervals because it was an obstruction to their operations.

She took one of Mat Clark's pistols from her pocket (having returned the other, with his knife) to the owner, when she turned him out of the house.

"Thar air six shots in this hyar weapon, an' I hev some cartridges in my pocket. But I don't know ez I'll hev ter use 'em. I'd rather trust ter my hands than er pistol. I don't like guns nohow," she muttered.

She walked swiftly along till she reached Dick Grier's cabin.

It was dark and evidently tenantless, for there was a padlock on the door, and the shutters of the windows were tightly closed.

"Wonder where Dude an' thet Professor chap are? He's er funny-lookin' feller!" thought Bess, laughing to herself at the recollection of the high collar, flashy necktie and light overcoat of Robert Roberts.

She walked all around the cabin to make sure that it was indeed empty, and then, with a firm step, as of one who had thoroughly made up her mind as to her plan of action, she traveled up the mountain in the direction of Silas Laurent's ranch.

And, some yards behind her, following like the shadow of fate, was a lank figure, with piercing eyes that watched her every movement, but that always kept in the background, taking advantage of the shelter of tree-trunks and loose masses of rocks to keep out of her sight.

It was the figure of Mat Clark, and he was seeking an opportunity to possess himself again of the precious paper for which he had already taken one life, and would take another, if necessary.

"Ef it wuzn't Bess Morrow, an' I wuzn't sich a fool ez ter love her better than myself, I'd hev thet paper inside uv two minutes," he muttered.

She walked swiftly up the mountain as one who knew her way, and although it was a very dark night, she avoided the obstructions on her way instinctively.

She struck a ledge on the face of a cliff at last, and Mat Clark knew that they were getting near to the house of Silas Laurent.

"Ef she is goin' ter thet house, I s'pose she'll stay thar, an' I'll hev no chance ter git that paper from her first. By heavens, I must do something."

Mat Clark began to feel desperate. The paper meant fortune to him, and here he found all his plans threatened with failure by a girl that he could have shot down from behind without her ever seeing her assassin.

It was a fortunate thing for Bess Morrow that Mat Clark was in love with her.

Bess had no knowledge of this, however, and it would have been a matter of astonishment to her had she been told that Mat had dogged her footsteps and was awaiting an opportunity to get back the paper.

She reached the narrow space at the back of the house, and knocked at the door.

A light shining through the chinks of the shutters at the window told her that the place was tenanted, while voices proclaimed that the inmates were awake.

The door opened, and a flood of light fell upon the rocky wall behind the shanty, as the neat, trim figure of Lucy Laurent stood in the doorway.

To run into her arms was, for Bess Morrow, the work of an instant.

"Bess!"

"Lucy!"

"Why are you hyar?"

"Because—"

Bess felt as if she were choking. Lucy saw it, and drawing her gently into the house, she murmured:

"Never mind, Bess, dear. Come in and pull yerself together."

The door closed, and Mat found himself alone on the rocky ledge, with no immediate prospect of gaining his object.

"I've got ter hev that paper!"

So saying, he crept up to the door, and finding a narrow chink that gave him a view of the interior, looked in.

He could see the two girls sitting on a sofa in the front parlor, where the piano already referred to stood open, giving the place a refined as well as comfortable air.

He could not hear what was being said, but he understood from the soothing manner in which

Lucy was patting Bess Morrow's hand, that she was speaking words of consolation to her friend.

"I'd give everything I had in the world if she wuz to talk ter me that thar way," was Mat Clark's observation, as he shook his head sadly.

Bess Morrow here took from her pocket the paper that he had stolen from her father, and that she had in turn possessed herself of, and spreading it out on the piano, seemed to be trying to understand it with Lucy.

Then Lucy said something that caused Bess to throw up her hands in astonishment, and examine the paper more intently than ever.

"I must hev that paper back ag'in, no matter how I git it."

There was fierce determination in Mat Clark's eye, and he examined his pistol in a significant manner.

There was murder in his every movement!

He looked at the strong wooden door, and then gave his attention to the fastenings.

A large bolt and a lock.

"Ha! Wal, I hevn't forgotten my trade, I guess," observed Mat, under his breath.

He had a pocket-knife, with a number of instruments in connection with it, and he examined it carefully by the feel, for it was too dark to see it.

"Wal, I've worked in ther dark often enough before," he chuckled.

A pick of steel was one of the implements, and when this was thrust into the keyhole, the slight curve of the pick took hold of the machinery of the lock and moved it without trouble.

"Thar's one thing out uv ther way, an' no noise, either."

He stooped to the chink and took a long look, to make sure that he had not disturbed any one inside.

The result of his observation was entirely satisfactory. The girls were still poring over the paper.

His bowie-knife next came into play. With its aid he shot back the big bolt swiftly and silently, and there was nothing to prevent his opening the door.

All was quiet within, and he insinuated his lauk body through the opening and stood in the general living room that was used also as a kitchen, and that was still damp from the hot water spilled over the floor during the visit of Jim Townley on the morning before.

The girls were standing with their backs to him, and as it was a still, warm night, they had not been warned by the entrance of air when the door was opened, that there was an intruder present.

"Cuss that thar Lucy Laurent! I'm more afraid uv her than I am uv Bess!" muttered Mat. "Ef they'd only give me some sort uv chance."

"Oh, Bess," exclaimed Lucy, at this instant. "Come into the other room an' let me show yer how I've fixed up my bed so ez it looks like er sofa in the daytime. It's ther cutest thing—"

She took her friend by the arm and led her into the other parlor without finishing her sentence.

This was Mat Clark's chance.

Like a panther, he leaped into the parlor and snatched the paper away.

Then he darted for the door to make his escape, hardly able to repress a cry of triumph.

He had reached the door, and was just about to pull it open and disappear, when a hand caught him by the collar, and a foot planted itself at his heel.

He tried to turn around so that he could save himself from falling—but in vain.

With a crash he fell flat upon the floor, as the paper was torn from his hand and a knee pressed heavily upon his chest.

When the girls went into the other room they took the lamp with them, so that the kitchen in which Mat Clark was struggling with his unknown foe was quite dark.

Mat was a wiry fellow, and although his antagonist had him at a disadvantage now, he felt that he was as powerful as the stranger.

Not a word was spoken by either, and although Mat had been thrown heavily, the house was so solidly built that neither Lucy nor Bess had noticed the jar.

It was simply a matter of skill and strength between the two men thus unexpectedly brought together as foes in the middle of the night.

Mat was lying flat on his back, and the knee that was pressing upon his chest was sufficiently heavy to keep him down, try as he would to recover himself.

He based his opinion of the comparative weakness of his antagonist upon the fact that his arms and hands trembled slightly as he seized Mat's shoulders.

Mat had had plenty of experiences similar to that he was enjoying now, and was accustomed to estimating the physical importance of an enemy at the very first clinch.

The bold that the unknown had upon Mat could not have been sustained for long no matter how powerful he had been. Mat knew this, so he relaxed his efforts to escape and quietly bided his time.

So long as Bess Morrow and Lucy Laurent did not come in, he felt that he would be safe to escape eventually, when his antagonist had tired himself out.

Sure enough, when Mat ceased pushing and pulling, the unknown eased up a little too, although he kept his knee on Mat's chest and never relaxed his hold upon his shoulders.

For perhaps two minutes they remained thus.

"Now is the time!" thought Mat, as he noticed that the hold upon his shoulder had become very slight.

A movement, as powerful as it was sudden, sent the unknown flying to one side, and the two men were squirming and turning over each other like snakes.

For an instant Mat was on top. Then he was below again, and he could almost feel the relentless knee in his chest, when a mighty twist saved him, and he was rolling over and over, fighting for his life.

"Wonder ef it wouldn't be a good thing to put my bowie 'tween his ribs," thought Mat, as he found himself hard pressed.

But it was not his policy to proceed to such extremes. He knew that, for some reason, his foe was not as strong as his size would have led one to suppose, and he felt sure of ultimate victory.

Even as he made up his mind to this, the struggle reached a point that bore out his conviction.

He had his opponent lying on his back, completely at his mercy, their relative positions being exactly the same as at first except that they were reversed. Now it was Mat Clark's knee that pressed into the chest of the unknown, and Mat Clark's clutch that was on the other's shoulders and throat.

"Now, whar did he throw that thar paper, I wonder. Let me git that, an' I don't want nothin' else."

It was impossible to see anything in the room, and Mat was afraid to let go of his enemy so that he could feel for the paper with his fingers.

"It must be somewhar within reach," he reflected. "But ef I ever let go uv this feller he'd get on top uv me again, an' then I'd be gone. I wish Bess hed never interfered with me. Then I'd hev hed ther paper all right, an' I wouldn't be in this hyar deuced scrape."

A gleam of light shone in the parlor, as the door between it and the room in which the two girls were was opened a little way.

A white object in the middle of the floor caught his eye. It was the paper!

Without thinking of anything but the map he was so anxious to possess, Mat released his hold upon his enemy and darted toward the paper.

He had it in his hand and a throb of joy ran through him.

But he was not permitted to enjoy his triumph long.

Hardly had he got the paper in his hand, when the room became illuminated as Lucy entered the parlor with a lamp in her hand and Bess Morrow holding her arm lovingly.

One glance in the direction of the two men struggling on the floor was enough for both young women.

Before Mat could make a movement in defense, the paper was snatched from his hand, and he was taken up bodily by four powerful hands, and literally lifted through the doorway and thrown several yards away on the rough rocky ledge outside the shanty.

Then, as the door was fastened, Lucy Laurent turned toward the man who had been struggling violently with Mat Clark for nearly ten minutes, and asked him, rather sharply:

"Dude Grier, why didn't you call us?"

Arthur Grier looked sheepishly from one to the other, and answered, simply:

"Lucy, I was ashamed."

"Ashamed?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, Lucy, I knew it was Mat Clark, and I have always considered that I could handle him as easily as if he were a child."

"P'raps so, Dude Grier, when you are feeling all right. But when a man has fallen down a canyon, an' been hauled up by a rope, with bruises all over his arms, and a bad crack in his head, he can't expect to have all his strength. Can he?"

"I never thought of that."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TERROR BLOCKS A GAME.

We must go back to Silas Laurent, whom we left guarding Jim Townley and Guerillo in their secret cave high up in the mountain.

For perhaps fifteen minutes after the detective had left the cave Silas kept vigilant watch upon his two prisoners.

If one of them moved ever so slightly the muzzle of a revolver pointed directly at his head, and the old man made an ostentatious business of getting ready to pull the trigger.

He seemed to be actually suffering to shoot down one or both of the men, and they realized the fact.

"Now, you fellers," he observed, after he had regarded them silently for some time, "I b'lieve ez ther best thing I could do for both ov yer would be to shoot all around yer, ter see how near I could come ter bittin' yer without actually

putting bullets into yer. What d'yer say, boys? It's er mighty good game."

"Durned old fool!" growled Townley, under his breath.

"Caramba!" exclaimed Guerillo.

"Guerillo, I wish you wouldn't allers say that. Thar ain't no sense in it, yer know, an' it makes me narvous!" went on Silas, in a comfortable, argumentative manner.

"Caramba!"

"Thar yer go ag'in. Durn your ugly yaller pictur. You've been sayin' that ever since you've been in this hyar camp. Quit it, will yer?"

"Car—"

A shot rung out in the cave, making a deafening noise in the confined space, and Silas sat on the steps coolly throwing out the empty shell and replacing it with a new cartridge, while the Mexican's face was taking on every shade of yellow and several of blue and green.

"I told yer not ter say that again, Guerillo."

"Car—"

"Quit it!" roared the old man, or I'll fire again, an' I'll hit yer ther next time!"

"You're a fool, Guerillo!" put in Jim Townley, as if he were merely stating a well-known fact.

After this little diversion there was a rather long silence, only broken by an occasional impatient sigh from Silas and a muttered "Caramba" from the Mexican, always in too low a tone for the old man to hear.

"My! I'm thirsty!" said the old man, at last, more to himself than to his companions.

They heard what he said, however, and Townley, who knew Silas Laurent's weakness, felt a thrill of hope at the plaint.

Another five minutes, and Silas Laurent whispered inaudibly:

"I'm ez dry ez er sand-bank. I must hev something to drink."

Although he did not speak loudly enough to be heard, Jim Townley knew what was passing in his mind.

"Silas!"

"Wal?"

"Did yer say ez you wuz thirsty?"

"Now, Jim Townley, none ov yer monkeying! What's yer game?" asked Silas, suspiciously.

"No pertick'ler game," was Townley's response, in a sullen tone.

There was another pause, during which it was evident the old man was cogitating over Townley's remarks.

"Jim?"

"Wal."

"What did yer mean?"

"Mean what?"

"When you asked me whether I wuz thirsty."

"Oh, nothin'!"

"Nothin'?"

"No."

"Wal, yer shouldn't say things ef yer don't mean nothin'!" answered Silas, in a tone of high moral reproof.

"Wal, Silas—" began Jim, and then he stopped.

"Go on, Jim. I'll let yer."

"Wal, I wuz goin' ter say that I mought give yer er good drink, ef yer wanted it."

Silas smacked his lips, but did not answer.

He was afraid of treachery in some form, although he could not have told what he feared.

There was a desperate struggle going on in his mind between caution and his appetite for liquor.

At last his appetite prevailed.

"Jim?"

"Wal!"

"Whar is that stuff?"

"In my pocket."

"Is it good?"

"You bet!"

"Guess I'll hev ter try a little."

"All right. Come an' git it."

"Caramba!" was the inaudible observation of the Mexican, although what he meant was probably known only to himself.

Silas Laurent stood up, with his pistols balanced in either hand, ready to be fired at either of his prisoners at the first suspicious movement.

But they did not do anything to call for any severe action on his part. Both looked as gentle as sucking doves.

Silas stepped cautiously to the corner where Jim Townley was sitting on the floor—he having dropped into that position when Silas took the office of guard—and held out his hand for the promised liquor.

"I can't give it to yer, Silas, with these hyar things on my wrists."

"Thet's so," acquiesced Silas, complacently.

"But whar is ther liquor?"

"In my hip-pocket."

"Get over, then, so ez I kin reach it."

Townley moved slightly, and the old man, still with a watchful eye upon the two men, drew an ordinary half-pint bottle from his hip-pocket.

Then he backed away, watching the prisoners, until he had regained his seat on the steps.

The Mexican and Townley exchanged glances, but so swiftly that Silas Laurent did not notice them, in spite of his boasted vigilance.

"Wal, gentlemen, hyar's yer health, an' may yer soon be swingin' at ther end uv er rope, with er dozen good men at the slack uv it."

"Thanks," responded Townley, cheerfully.

"Ha, ha! Eet ees a good joke!" added the Mexican, with his usual ghastly grin.

Silas Laurent winked knowingly as he drew the cork from the bottle with his teeth, and sniffed at the contents with a loud snort.

The result was apparently satisfactory, for he put the bottle to his lips and drank about half the whisky at one draught, without pausing for breath.

The Mexican and Townley watched him eagerly.

The liquor made the old man more talkative than ever, and he blinked at his prisoners like a very wise old owl.

"Yer see, boys. Nothin' kin hurt me, else I wouldn't dare ter drink this hyar stuff, fer it's 'bout ez strong an' or'nary ez anything I ever tasted."

Neither Townley or Guerillo answered, but Silas evidently did not want an answer, for he drove on without a pause:

"It's er good job fer me ez I'm smart, an' kin keep sich fellers ez you under my thumb, or I don't know where I'd be."

His head dropped forward on his breast, and he seemed to take a short nap. But he awoke with a start, and finding the bottle in his hand, prepared to take another drink, but stopped long enough to remark, in a preachy sort of way:

"Ef I wuz ter tell you whar I've got that thar paper, I guess it wouldn't take yer long ter find it."

Townley scowled, and he made a slight movement as if he would dart forward and brain the old man with his handcuffs. But he controlled himself, and growled:

"You bet you're smart, Silas. I've always known that, I wish I wuz ez smart."

"Course yer do, Jim, but yer ain't. Yer see, I just put that paper—"

He broke off to leer stupidly at Townley, the liquor having had an extraordinary effect upon him, and then, shaking his head solemnly, drank the other half of the liquor in the bottle.

As he swallowed the last drop, the bottle fell out of his hand, and he rolled down the steps to the floor of the cave, breathing in a stertorous way that would have told a physician in a moment that the liquor was drugged.

"Now, Guerillo! Quick!" cried Townley, running forward and raising Silas in anything but a gentle manner with the toe of his boot.

Silas emitted a short groan, that resolved itself into a prolonged snore.

"Caramba! Ze wheesky vas goot, eh?"

"Yes. It's er good job I hed it ready. I thought ez I might meet him at his shanty in the morning, when I wanted ter talk ter Lucy. Wal, I didn't meet him thar, but ther stuff hez come in all right arter all."

"Yes! I fix eet. I've done zat before, in Cheecago, an' eet always works," said the Mexican.

"Wal, get them thar things off an' come an' help me," growled Townley, impatiently.

Guerillo showed all his teeth, as he swung his handcuffs daintily around in his right hand, he having slipped them over his long, supple hands at the very time that Silas Laurent was watching him with a revolver in his hand.

He stepped over to Townley, and with a small piece of wire that he drew from his pocket, delicately and swiftly picked the locks of his companion's handcuffs, and set him free.

Townley did not waste time in thanking the Mexican, but, in a business-like way, searched the clothing of the old man, in the hope of finding the precious paper.

"He ain't got it, Guerillo! Thet's certain," he said, at last, after a thorough examination of the old man's attire."

"Caramba!"

"Yes, caramba all you want, but it won't make no difference. Ef he'd only finished what he wuz goin' ter say afore he drank up ther last uv that thar liquor, we'd ha' had him dead."

"Caramba! He knew too mooch fer that!" observed Guerillo, with a shake of the head.

"Look out! What's that?" suddenly whispered Jim Townley, looking toward the entrance of the cave.

"Caramba!"

Townley and Guerillo both flew over to the places they had occupied when the detective had left them in charge of Silas Laurent, and disposing their handcuffs so that it would not be easy to see that they were not still held prisoners, waited.

They had not long to wait.

The sound of some one crawling along the big log, and then letting himself down upon the plank that led to the doorway of the cave, was plainly audible.

"Wish he'd tumble inter thar canyon and break his durned neck," whispered Townley.

"Caramba! So do I!" returned Guerillo, in the same tone.

But the visitor whoever he was, evidently knew his way, and was conversant with the dangers to be avoided, as well as the means of getting into the cave.

The two men inside had hardly managed to dispose themselves in attitudes that would not excite suspicion, when an ugly yellow face, from which piercing black eyes beamed from beneath the broad hat, filled up the opening.

"Mat Clark!" exclaimed Townley and the Mexican, simultaneously.

"Thet's what! What are yer doin' hyar? Did yer expect me afore this?"

"Wal, yes, Mat. We thought you'd be hyar ef yer hed anythin' ter tell, an' we rather 'spected yer would hev."

"I ain't got nothin' good ter say, nohow," observed Mat, dolefully. "But what air yer doin' with old Silas hyar? Yer ain't rubbed him out, hev yer?"

"No. He's taken a drink uv some stuff ez I hed fixed. Thet's all. I'm goin' ter hev that paper the old scoundrel hez, somehow."

"Whar is it?"

"Thet's what I don't know. What kin you tell us 'bout it, Mat?"

"Nothin'. I got that paper from Arch Morrow—"

"Ez is dead?" suggested Townley, with a significant grin.

"Ez is dead," acquiesced Mat. "But you ain't goin' ter give me away, I s'pose?"

"No. Go on."

"But that daughter uv his hez it now."

"Ah!"

"Yes, an' she's at Silas's shanty below thar. An' thar is Dude Grier an' Lucy Laurent thar with her."

"Wal, we must git that paper afore mornin'," said Townley, decidedly.

"Ees, that ye moost," added Guerillo.

"Then we kin find out whar ther old man hez is, and get that from ther Professor, and we'll be all right. See?"

"Caramba! Eet ees all right, 'cept takin' ze papaire from zat Boston Bob," muttered the Mexican, trembling at the very name of the detective.

"Wal, we hev ter do it," declared Townley.

"Yes, it must be done," agreed Mat. "Whar is he?"

"He'll be back hyar 'fore long. He left ther old man on guard, but I'm expectin' him back every moment."

"Hum!" said Mat.

"Caramba!" groaned the Mexican.

"Look out," whispered Townley.

He and the Mexican hastily took their old places in the corner, while Mat hid himself behind the curtains.

"Now, boys, shoot him down ez soon ez he comes in. He hez that paper, an' we've got ter git it. He's er stranger in these parts, an' ef he's killed no one won't be the wiser."

"All right!" said Clark.

The sound of some one coming on the log and the platform was heard again, and the three desperadoes stood with revolvers drawn, ready to fire as soon as the new-comer should appear.

"Aim low!" whispered Townley, in a voice full of bloodthirsty determination.

There was a shadow at the opening, and then, just as a coil of heavy rope was thrown down the stairs, three revolvers cracked and the cave was full of smoke.

Before the desperadoes realized what had happened, a man leaped down the steps and had knocked Mat Clark's revolver out of his hand, just as a quick, true shot from his own pistol had sent that of Jim Townley flying into a corner.

Guerillo was the only one of the three who retained his hold upon his weapon, but it hung down in his nerveless hand, as his dry lips gasped:

"Boston Bob, ze Holy Terror!"

CHAPTER XVII.

PAPER NUMBER THREE.

MAT was the first one to recover himself.

He saw that the detective's back was toward him, and he did not stop to argue the matter.

With two or three strides of his long legs he had reached the door, and he was out of sight before the slower wits of Townley and the Mexican had permitted them to realize that escape might be possible if sought promptly.

The detective saw Silas Laurent lying on the floor, and he comprehended the situation at a glance.

"Confound it, gentlemen! You have been playing a very pretty engagement in my absence," he said, in his pleasant, courteous tones. "I think you might have allowed my poor old friend, Mr. Laurent, to retain such senses as nature has given him, until my return."

Townley shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Townley, keep quiet, or I shall be compelled to teach you a lesson in politeness. I'm getting somewhat tired of your boorish ways."

"Caramba!" croaked the Mexican.

"Guerillo, I will attend to you later," added the detective, pleasantly.

"What are yer goin' ter do now?" asked Townley, in a sullen tone.

"Well, I'm going to give you two gentlemen another chance."

"What is it?"

"Get!"

"What?"

"Get out. I don't want to be bothered with you any more. Throw down that pistol, Guerillo."

The Mexican dropped the weapon as if it were red-hot.

"Good! Now, I'm going to take charge of this cave and its contents, and I want you to leave the country, and never show up in this neighborhood again. You can walk down to the road, and catch the stage for Prescott in the morning, and then keep away."

"An' ef we don't feel like goin', what then?" asked Jim Townley, defiantly.

"I'll shoot you down like a dog—unless I make up my mind to have you hung for a horse-thief. It is very simple, you see."

The detective had his little whisk-brush in his left hand, and was brushing his shoulder as he spoke, but the nervous white hand that held the revolver kept up an ominous twitching, and there was no reason to doubt that he would pull the trigger effectively at the first sign of treachery on the part of either of his companions.

His glasses were on his nose, and in spite of his rough experiences of the past twenty-four hours, he was as neat and trim as when he was first introduced to the reader on the mountain road where Jim Townley held Dude Grier at such a serious disadvantage.

"Well, gentlemen, are you going?"

The detective's voice was so soft, and his manner so gentle, that it was dangerous. He was like a sleeping volcano.

"Come on, Guerillo!" growled Townley.

"Caramba! I come!" responded the Mexican.

The two men walked along the cave toward the entrance. Townley first and Guerillo at his heels. The detective stood with his back against the wall, watching them steadily as they marched out, and ready to fire when it should become necessary or expedient.

Hardly had they disappeared, and the detective was still standing vigilant, and prepared for any underhand attack, when a peal of mocking laughter that he recognized as in Townley's tones, was followed by a cracking noise and the sound of something rattling against the rocky face of the cliff, as it dropped into the awful depths.

"One of them fallen down the canyon, I suppose," thought Robert, with a calm expression on his face.

He walked leisurely up the steps and looked out. One glance was enough to show him the trick played upon him by Jim Townley and Guerillo.

They had destroyed the bridge that formed the only means of communication between the outside world and the cave, by dislodging the plank that did duty for it.

The big heavy log referred to several times as marking the plank was still there, but it was impossible to reach it without the plank that had just been tumbling into the chasm.

The detective could just discern the faces of Jim and Guerillo looking over the log, and he noted that the savage expression on Townley's face was duplicated in that of the Mexican, with a strong admixture of fear that nothing but a strong respect for the prowess of the detective could bring into his face.

"The rascals!" muttered Robert. "They think they've caught me like a rat in a trap, I suppose. Well, this settles them. I have given them a chance, and they haven't taken it. They will never get another."

There was a set expression in Robert's face that boded no good to the grinning desperadoes who had just turned away from the edge of the log and disappeared in the gloom.

He turned toward the interior of the cave with the consoling knowledge that if he could not make his way out that way, at all events, no one could come in.

His first proceeding was to try and wake old Silas Laurent. He knew what to do and he did it without hesitation. He took a bottle of strong ammonia from his pocket and applied it to the old man's nose. Then he got some water from a running stream just outside the door, that poured from the rocks and dropped into the chasm, and bathed his head thoroughly.

Ten minutes of this sort of treatment brought the old man to himself, and he looked with bleary eyes at the detective, as he stammered:

"Whazzer-mazzer?"

Robert shook him with more energy than kindness and answered:

"I'll tell you what is the matter. You have let those men get out, although I told you to watch them."

Silas had come to himself now, and it was with a clearer idea of the situation that he said:

"Yes, they gave me some stuff that laid me out. I wuz a fool, but I wuz so durned dry that I was glad ter take anything."

The detective did not waste any more time with the old man but hastily told him how he had let Jim Townley and Guerillo go, knowing that he could easily lay his hands upon them again if he wanted them, and how they had broken down the bridge with the idea of making him a prisoner in the cave.

"It is easy enough to get out ther other way," suggested Silas, nodding carelessly toward that

part of the ceiling where it will be remembered, the trap led to his own retreat.

"Yes. That is simple enough. But now, Silas, I want to know where that paper is that these fellows have been trying to get from you."

The old man screwed up his eyes with a cunning expression.

"Now, see here, Silas. I have one of those papers, you have another, and—"

"I have another," said a voice, that both recognized as that of Bess Morrow.

They had been standing by the open doorway, and it was a very easy thing for any one standing on the log to overhear their conversation.

"Bess!" exclaimed the detective.

"Thet's what! Look out! I'm comin'! I know ther way. I've jumped on this hyar plank below the log afore this, you kin bet."

"Hold! Bess! hold!" shouted the detective, putting more energy into his voice than either the girl or Silas had ever heard.

"What's ther matter? Why can't I come? I know it's all right. I see'd thet sneakin' Mat Clark goin' down ther mountain, an' Dude says he see Jim Townley an' thet Greaser goin' away through ther trees. Thet's ther reason we all come. We wanted ter see what yer wuz doin' hyar when yer all ought ter be home."

Bess Morrow spoke rapidly, as was her wont; and she was evidently under the influence of an excitement that made her for the time forget the tragic death of her father.

"You can't come this way, Bess!" cried Bob.

"Why not?"

She was standing on the log, and was looking straight down into the black darkness of the yawning pit, with no more fear of giddiness than if the log was lying flat on the ground.

"The plank is gone, Jim Townley and Guerillo have thrown it down."

"Is thet so? Wal, I'm er-comin' down this hyer way, anyhow. You hear me?"

"How are you coming?" asked the detective.

"Throw me up the end of thet rope thet you hev down ther, an' I'll soon show yer," answered Bess.

Without a word, the detective picked up the rope that had already played so important a part in the rescue of Dude Grier, and that the detective had made good use of by throwing it into the cave before descending himself, thereby saving his life.

"You'd better take it double, Bess," he suggested.

"Yes, you're right," she assented.

He doubled the rope, and threw the two ends to the girl, who was clearly defined against the starlit sky as she stood sturdily on the log, waiting for it.

Quickly he twisted the other double-end around the steps, till the rope was taut.

"Now, Bess, if you're coming!" cried the detective.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when Bess came sliding down the rope with a sort of spring, and dropped squarely into his arms.

"Well done, Bess!"

"Wait er minute. We ain't through yit," was Bess's response.

Before the detective understood what she meant, another female figure came down in the same reckless, dare-devil fashion.

"Lucy!"

"What, my Lucy?" exclaimed Silas, as he recognized his daughter.

"Yes, dad. Did yer think I'd let Bess come by herself? Not much."

"Well, are there any more of you?" asked the detective.

"Yes," answered Bess, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Course thet is."

"Who?"

"Look out!" was Lucy's answer to this query.

It was a man this time that slid down the rope, and the detective thought he was not so active as the girls.

"Arthur?"

"Yes. I'm not so spry as I might be, but I'm here at last," said the young man, laughing apologetically.

"Well, that's the main thing after all," added the detective, as he cut off the rope close to the log, so that no one could come by the rope route without making preparations that would be sure to attract attention.

"This is er funny sort uv convention," said old Silas. "What air we all er doin' hyar? Thet's what I want ter know. I don't see no sense in it."

The detective looked at the old man with an expression of mild scorn, and responded by drawing a paper from his pocketbook and spreading it on the rough table in the middle of the cave.

"What's that?"

"It is one-third of a map and memoranda showing how to find the pay streak of gold in Yuma county that will make the owner of the land a millionaire several times over. You can look at it, ladies and gentlemen."

All four of his listeners came forward and bent over the paper, each with an expression of the deepest interest.

"One-third of it; that is all," repeated Bob.

"One-third of it," said Dude Grier.

"One-third of it," from Lucy Laurent, as she looked at the paper and then at the faces of those around her.

"One-third of it," repeated Silas.

Bess Morrow looked closely at the paper for about a minute without speaking.

She was evidently in a brown study.

At last she said, slowly:

"One-third of it."

"Yes, Bess, that's what Ther Professor says," remarked the old man, with a curious look at the young woman.

"One-third of it," she repeated, still more slowly.

Placing one hand flat upon the paper on the table, she plunged the other into her dress and drew forth another that looked like a counterpart of the first.

"Aha!" came from Silas Laurent, more in a sigh than in words.

"Two papers!"

There was no emotion to be detected in the tones of the detective's voice. He spoke as if stating a fact in which he had no particular interest.

The fact that his heart was bounding with satisfaction was known only to himself.

"Let me see them, Bess," he continued, as with deft fingers he placed the two maps together so that the lines ran without a break from one to the other.

"That is not enough, eh, Bob?" whispered Arthur Grier in his ear.

The reply was short, but it was obvious that the only reason for it was that the extravagantly dressed little man was in deep thought. He did not mean to be rude.

"What shall we do?" asked Dude.

"What do you mean?"

"Can not we get along at all without that third portion of the map?"

"No."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Yes."

"Can you get it?"

"It depends upon one of we five in this cave!" answered Bob, with an impassive face.

"You mean to say it is in this room?"

"I mean to say that it may or may not be in this room, but that certainly one of us knows where it is."

"That may be so, but perhaps the person can not get it, even although knowing where it is?"

"He can get it if he wants to do so."

"He?" said Arthur Grier, with an intelligent look.

"I used the term 'he' in its general sense, and not as denoting a member of the male sex," replied Robert, quietly.

"Say, Professor," broke in Silas Laurent, "I'll bring you that paper."

"Thanks," was the courteous, cool response.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TERROR HOLDS THE GAME.

FOR a moment every one looked at Silas Laurent inquiringly.

Except the detective no one knew that he had the third paper that was to make the map of the famous gold mine complete, and give a colossal fortune to the person who should be revealed by the paper as the owner.

The only person who knew who this would be, for certain, was the detective, although Dude Grier had the testimony of Boston Bob that it would be Lucy Laurent.

"Well, Mr. Laurent," observed the detective, after a few moments' pause, while Silas looked around the company as if half sorry that he had committed himself.

"Wal!" responded the old man.

"We are waiting."

Silas sighed heavily. He had preserved his secret so well in spite of the efforts of others to wrest it from him, that it was positive pain to reveal it now.

"Wal, I s'pose I must give it up!"

Robert did not answer, but spent the moments in looking at himself in a cracked mirror that he had found against the wall.

"I wonder," he observed, at last, in his cool way, "I wonder—" and paused.

"Well, what do you wonder, Robert?" asked Arthur Grier.

"Oh! Yes! I wonder what could have induced two such ill-looking fellows as Jim Townley and Guerillo to put a looking-glass where there was danger of their seeing their own reflections occasionally. That is all."

There was a general titter, but The Professor only looked surprised. He had spoken in perfect good faith.

Meanwhile, Silas Laurent had strolled over to the corner in which were thrown the weapons stolen from his great iron chest, and was looking them over, absent-mindedly, as if to assure himself that they were not injured, and had not been deprived of any of the precious stones imbedded in them since they were taken from his home.

He took the quaint old pistols in his hands, and patted their jeweled butts almost as lovingly as if they were children. Long muskets of Spanish make with curiously carved stocks, inlaid with silver and pearl, were there, and he

picked them up gently and laid them down again, in a purposeless way, as if he enjoyed merely touching them.

He shook his head dolefully, but that was a habit of his, and might mean nothing at all. But there was no mistaking the expression of satisfaction in his face when he dragged out from the mass an old-fashioned blunderbuss, with a bell-shaped muzzle, such as the early Puritan fathers in Connecticut were wont to carry with them to church when they feared to meet Indians or witches on their way.

There were no jewels or expensive d corations about this weapon. It was a plain, old-fashioned gun, and if it was fired with a load of small shot it could be warranted to hit everything within a radius of a hundred yards.

He came toward the others grouped around the table, with the blunderbuss on his shoulder, and then laid the unwieldy thing right across the map.

"Hyer it is," he said, looking at The Professor.

"What?"

"Ther other part uv that thar paper. Ther fellers ez stole these weapons wuzn't slick enough to find what they wuz lookin' fer, though it wuz right under their noses."

Silas, with a superior grin, here thrust his hand down the muzzle of the weapon, and drew out between two of his fingers a dirty, folded paper.

Boston Bob snatched it with more than his usual haste, and glanced over it hastily.

"Number Three!" he shouted, triumphantly.

The old man threw the blunderbuss into the corner, not caring whether it knocked off any of the jewels from the other arms or not. All he wanted was to see how the paper, Number Three, would tell where this wonderful property was, and how it was to be bestowed. He had had it conveyed to him in some way, he could hardly tell what, that it was to go to his daughter, Lucy. But it had all been in a mist, as it were. Now the matter was to be laid open to him, and he was to know what had so long been a sealed mystery.

The detective went about his arrangements deliberately. After the first burst of excitement over obtaining the paper, he had become again the apathetic little dude, whose collars and cuffs, and the set of his coat and trowsers, were supposed to be of more importance than anything else.

How much of this regard for his dress was real, and how much put on, could only be guessed. The reader, probably, has his own ideas on the matter.

He smoothed out the two papers already on the table, which were of such shape as to leave a large, irregular space about the middle. Into this irregular space the third paper fitted with nice exactness, showing that it was meant to go there, and that the man who had arranged this document had a cunning intellect and the determination to carry out any plans he had formed, regardless of the comments of others.

The detective found that the document was complete, and that there was not a scrap missing.

Then he stood back from the table and emitted a chuckle full of enjoyment.

"Wal, what do yer make uv it all?" asked Silas, who had been watching the detective's proceedings rather impatiently.

"We are all friends here?" remarked Robert, interrogatively, as he looked around.

"Yes, yes," answered the old man, testily. "Of course."

"Well, this property, in Yuma county, Arizona, that will yield a fortune with very little working, is bequeathed to Lucy Laurent, daughter of Silas Laurent, formerly of Chicago, Illinois, but whose present residence is unknown," went on the detective, reading from some closely written memoranda near the center of the completed paper, but of which it would have been impossible to make anything while the three papers were separate.

Arthur Grier watched the girl while the detective read this, but he could not detect any particular elation in her manner. She hardly realized what the possession of so much property meant.

"Wal, Mister Professor, how is my darter ter git this property?" demanded Silas, who was disposed to be arrogant over Lucy's good fortune.

"She must go to Chicago, with this paper, which I shall retain in my possession, and satisfy a firm of lawyers there, Sharpe, Knowlton & Bright, that she is really the Lucy Laurent named in this document, and therefore entitled to the property under the will of Hawkins Smail, the banker, whose gift to Lucy Laurent this property is."

"Oh!"

"There is a clause here that if Lucy should be dead, or could not be found within a period of not less than five years from the date of the death of the testator, the property should be taken by any one that could find it, this map and key to the same to be destroyed by the said firm of Sharpe, Knowlton & Bright."

"Wal, but the lawyers hevn't got ther paper," put in Bess Morrow, who had been

listening with the greatest interest to the explanation of The Professor.

"No, because the residence Banker Smail was robbed one night, and this paper, with other valuables, carried off by—"

"Hold on, thar, Professor!" interrupted Silas, excitedly. "Don't say more than yer hev ter. Thar ain't no use in diggin' up bygones hyar. Now, is that?"

"Certainly not. However, I am the representative of the Chicago law firm of Sharpe, Knowlton & Bright, and although I have not the authority to make a settlement of the matter, my instructions are to find this property, according to the diagram and directions I have here, before returning to Chicago."

"Good! That's business."

"And," continued the detective, significantly, as he brushed a little dust from his coat-sleeve with his delicate, white fingers, "to see that certain property, consisting of firearms and other weapons, of old-fashioned design, and generally of considerable intrinsic value, are placed in the care of that same law firm, to be bestowed upon the person to whom they were bequeathed in the will of the millionaire banker, of Chicago, Hawkins Smail."

Silas winced, and was about to speak, but the detective put up his hand and continued.

"There is no occasion for any remarks. I know where this property is, and I shall take an early opportunity of comparing it with a list I have in my pocket, furnished me by Sharpe, Knowlton & Bright, before I left Chicago."

"Wal, what now?" asked Silas.

"I'll tell yer what now," interposed Bess. "I think it is time we had some sleep. I've been living in such a way for the last two days that I hardly know whether it is night or morning. But I do know that this hyar honorable company can't do much good till it's hed some rest. An' ther best thing is ter take it now."

"Good, sensible idea. But where shall we all sleep?"

"Lucy an' Bess kin make themselves comf'able down hyar," said Silas, "an' ther men folks kin all climb up to ther crib above. You know ther way, Professor, don't yer?" he added, with a significant grin.

"Yes."

"All right, then. Take keer uv them papers an' let's cl'ar out."

The detective carefully rolled up the three sections of the diagram of the famous gold claim, and placed it in an inside pocket. Then he examined his two revolvers and a bowie-knife, and Dude Grier, who was similarly armed, looked over his weapons to see that the guns were not likely to miss fire, and that the bowie was ready to his hand.

Silas was looking in a wistful manner at the pile of jeweled weapons in the corner, when The Professor tapped him on the shoulder and called him to himself:

"Never mind about them, Silas. You can find two good six-shooters up there for yourself, I suppose, with two more for Bess Morrow?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, do, then. Your daughter is all right."

"You bet. Lucy knows ez it's allers best ter be heeled, when snakes an' coyotes like Jim Townley and that cussed Greaser air on ther rampage. I ain't never 'fraid 'bout Lucy."

"Good! Lead on!"

In a very short space of time the three men had climbed through the small opening in the roof into the cave of Silas Laurent, and the old man was handing down the revolvers to Bess Morrow, who stood on a chair to reach them."

"You've got plenty uv cartridges down ther I know."

"Yes."

"Wal, keep yer guns filled, an' ef yer hev ter shoot, why, shoot durned quick. I don't see what's ter disturb yer, howsumever," was the sage observation of the old man as he replaced the trap door and made arrangements for the comfort of his guests for the rest of the night.

Two cot beds were assigned to Dude Grier and Robert Roberts respectively, with plenty of blankets. Then the old man threw himself upon a heap of blankets and buffalo-robos in a corner, after blowing out the candle stuck in the neck of a bottle, and in ten minutes the melodious snoring of the three men told that they were sleeping with the soundness of those accustomed to adventures, and to taking rest whenever they could get it.

There was no disturbance that night—or rather, morning, for it was approaching daylight when they sought their respective couches—and it was well toward noon when Lucy awoke and spoke to her companion.

Bess responded at the first word and the two young women had made use of the spring at the entrance to the cave to give themselves a refreshing wash, and were busy among the house-keeping stores of Messrs. Townley and Guerillo, in the way of preparations for breakfast when there was a vigorous thumping on the trap door over their heads.

"That's dad," observed Lucy, calmly. "Let him give another crack at it. It's good exercise, an' he allers feels ruther stiff in ther morning."

The girls laughed joyously, even Bess, with

her natural spirits being able to join in the merriment with a zest she would have thought impossible twenty-four hours previously, when her father's murder was fresh in her memory.

"All right, dad! Pull up the trap!" sung out Lucy in her clear, lusty tones, "an' we'll see 'bout breakfast."

The trap was raised, and Silas's face appeared at the opening.

"What did yer say 'bout breakfast, gals? I'll tell yer thar is three or four hungry men up hyar, an' you'll hev ter put in yer best licks in ther way uv hotel-keepin' 'ef you air goin' ter satisfy them."

"Bring 'em down, dad, an' we'll try what we kin do, anyway," answered Lucy.

The old man climbed down without any more ado. Then Arthur Grier, who had evidently found means to wash, and who looked as ruddy and fresh as as mountain milkmaid, and last Robert Roberts, who might just have stepped out of a Broadway barber shop. He had managed to provide himself with clean linen in some mysterious manner known only to himself, and which he always, with a slight laugh, termed "merely forethought," and there was not a speck of dust or a wrinkle to be noticed on his attire. The derby hat had been well brushed, and the toothpick shoes newly varnished. Then he had been shaved well (for it was one of his modest boasts that he had "a firm, light hand with a razor,") and his hair had been trimmed and brushed into just the shape that he considered proper.

As the detective dropped into the lower cave, and made a sweeping bow to the ladies, he looked more like a quiet little professor than ever, particularly when he adjusted his gold-rimmed eye-glasses and beamed benevolently upon the table, where a toothsome breakfast had been arranged by the two young women.

"I hope you slept well, ladies?" observed Robert, with the *aplomb* of a man of the world, while Arthur Grier, standing rather sheepishly behind Lucy Laurent, thought how pleasant it must be to possess such easy manners in the presence on the fair sex.

"Oh, yes, Professor—splendidly. The only thing that disturbed us was the noise of the street cars, and the boys calling the New York morning papers. But one must expect such little annoyances when one lives in a city like Hopeful Gulch."

Lucy said this soberly, but the twinkle in her eye was full of humor, and she and The Professor seemed to enjoy the harmless little joke so much that Arthur Grier had to call himself a fool to prevent his feeling jealous.

"Breakfast!" announced Silas, and they all sat down on anything they could find, the three men being seated about on logs and boxes, and the women remaining at the table to dispense the coffee, fried pork, potatoes, canned corn and bread that had been found in Jim Townley's larder.

Everything was good, even the bread, although it was probably a week old, and the queerly assorted company enjoyed the meal immensely, to all appearances.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MURDEROUS PLUNGE.

We must now follow the proceedings of some other personages in our story, if only to see what new mischief they may be hatching.

Mat Clark, it may be remembered, was the first to beat a retreat from the cave when the detective returned, and found Silas Laurent insensible, and Townley and the Mexican in possession.

Mat had long legs, and he used them to advantage in getting along the mountain path toward the lower camp, when Townley and Guerillo made their appearance behind him, so that he could just discern them among the trees.

"Come back, yer coward!" yelled Jim.

"Caramba! Why?" remonstrated the Mexican. "He no good!"

"Come back!" cried Townley, again disregarding Guerillo's remonstrance.

Mat stopped.

"D'y'e hear me?"

Townley had pulled a revolver from his belt, for the detective had not taken the trouble to search either him or the Mexican, being satisfied to let them keep any weapons they might have besides those he took from them.

Mat saw the revolver and dodged behind a tree.

"Put your gun away, 'im I'm coming," he croaked in humble tones.

"Yer'd better."

"Caramba!"

"Shut up! You're a'most ez big er fool ez he is, Guerillo!" growled Townley, who was in the delightful humor of being ready for a quarrel with any one.

Mat came slowly up the path, and Townley saw that he had a long knife in his hand.

"What yer carryin' thar knife fer?" demanded Jim, with a heavy scowl.

"Nothin'!"

"Wal, put it in yer pocket."

"Why?"

"Never mind! Do ez I tell yer."

"All right, Jim."

Mat hid the knife, although he looked dubiously at Jim Townley's frowning countenance as he approached the spot where he and Guerillo stood.

"We're all 'spectable citizens around hyar, an' we don't want no knives nor nc guns unless thar's use fer 'em. Eh, Guerillo?"

"Caramba!"

"Might hev known yer'd say that," growled Townley. "The durned Greaser hardly ever says anything else. Wal, never mind. Mat?"

"Wal?"

"We're in er bad hole."

"Seems like it."

"We hev ter get out."

"Sure!"

"But how? What air we ter do?"

Mat took out his long, keen knife and thoughtfully felt the edge and point with his fingers. Then he made a few vicious lunges at the air with a significant expression in his face.

"Caramba! Ees! Keel 'em!" put in the Mexican, to whom Mat Clark's pantomime was more lucid than words.

"Durn you fellers! Yer allers want ter kill folks," said Jim Townley, with a virtuous air.

"Wal, why not?" queried Clark.

"Ees! Caramba!"

"Wal, I'll tell yer—"

"Go on, Jim. Tell us. What air yer stoppin' fer? What's ther matter?"

"I'd say kill, too, only—"

"Wal?"

"Yer see, thar's er gal ez—ez—"

"Ez ye'r sweet on. I know that," put in Clark. "But that's nothin'! Thar's er gal thar ez I'm sweet on. You know that!"

"Oh, durn your sweetness!" was Jim Townley's ungracious response.

"Sart'inly! I'm agreeable. But that ain't ther p'int, don't yer see, Jim?"

"What is ther p'int?"

"Wait and I'll tell yer."

"Drive ahead, then."

The Mexican was taking earnest note of the conversation, although not saying much. It was easier, and, he believed, more profitable, to listen to than to talk.

The three men had been walking up the mountain through a thick wood of pine and other trees, and were now far enough away from the cave to be safe from any intrusion from the detective, even if he could have escaped after Townley and Guerillo had destroyed the bridge, unless, indeed, he had followed them closely—which they were sure he had not.

Mat Clark had been walking a step or so in advance of Jim, with the Mexican bringing up the rear, but all so close that they could discuss private matters without being afraid of eavesdroppers, even should there be any, which was very unlikely.

"The p'int is, ef I understand anything 'bout this hyar business, ter git hold uv them thar three papers ez make up er mighty vall'able document when put altogether. Eh, toys?"

Townley and the Mexican nodded gravely.

"Wal, then," resumed Mat, "we know who hez 'em now, don't we?"

"Caramba!" hissed Guerillo.

"Yes, I know. That durned little detective, thar's ez dangerous ez er tarantula, an' jist about ez spiteful, in spite uv his mild looks," said Clark.

"But we'll hev 'em, though, in spite uv him," declared Townley, savagely, placing his hand on the butt of the revolver in his belt.

"Course we will, Jim. Trust Mat Clark. He ain't er baby, though he don't blow much 'bout what he kiu do," observed the lantern-jawed gentleman, patronizingly.

"Who does blow?" demanded Townley, turning upon him suddenly.

Mat Clark hastened to conciliate him.

"Oh, no one—no one, Jim. I didn't mean that," answered Clark, hastily.

"Wal, be keerful what yer say," growled Jim, "'cause I don't like insinuations."

They had been walking along briskly, and now they came to a small clearing in the middle of a dense wood, where the rays of the moon showed a small wooden shanty built against the side of the mountain, and overshadowed by an immense pine tree that spread over every part and tapped with its branches against the door and the shutters of the only window.

"Hello, whar air we?"

"Why, Jim, you ought ter know this hyar crib. You've been hyar afore," said Mat Clark, apparently rather hurt. "This hyar's ther place ez I call home 'cept when I sleep down ter Arch Morrow's."

"Caramba! Ees. I know ze place," declared the Mexican, showing all his white teeth in a propitiatory grin.

"By ther piper, Mat, so it is. Funny I didn't reckernize it right away," added Townley.

"Wal, open her up."

Mat Clark, in the character of host, dug away some loose earth from one side of the trunk of the big pine, with his fingers, and drew forth a large key, with which he opened the door of the cabin and welcomed his guests to his humble abode.

"Now, boys," began Mat, as soon as he had closed the door, and lighted a lamp that stood ready upon a neat round table in one corner of the one room of which the house consisted.

"Hold on, Mat," interrupted Jim Townley.

"Ain't you got nothin' ter drink in ther house?"

"Sorry, Jim, but I never hev it. When I'm hyar, it's allers fer bizness, an' I never want ter cloud my brain with whisky."

"Who want's whisky? I want water," returned the other impatiently.

"Oh!"

Mat took a quart bucket, and going a few yards from the house, found one of those springs of pure water to be met with occasionally in the mountain districts of Arizona.

While he was away Townley stepped quickly over to the Mexican and exchanged a few words with him in whispers.

"Shall we take him in, Guerillo?"

"Caramba! I no care."

"Nor I. Can be help us?"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"Thet's my opinion, too. He's no good."

"Caramba!"

"Why not rub him out?"

"Who?"

Jim Townley snarled impatiently.

"Who d'ye suppose, yer durned fool? Ain't we talking 'bout Mat?"

"I meant who ees to do eet?"

"Oh, yer bloodthirsty Greaser! I might ha' known he wouldn't hesitate," muttered Townley, in an almost inaudible tone.

"V'at you say?" asked Guerillo.

"Why, I don't know yet."

Mat Clark was heard at the door outside, and Jim hastily whispered:

"Wait awhile. Don't do nothin' till I tell yer."

Clark came in with the bucket of water and looked and barred the door calmly before he handed the water to Jim Townley. Then, as the desperado took the bucket and raised it to his lips, the yellow face loomed up close to his, while Mat Clark's piercing black eyes looked him through. At the same time, Mat Clark's voice hissed in his ear:

"Don't try it, Jim Townley."

The other started.

"What d'yer mean?"

"I mean it won't pay yer ter take ther Greaser in with yer ef yer feel ez yer hev ter rub Mat Clark out. I ain't rubbed out easily."

"I dunno what yer mean?" faltered Townley, who began to think this cadaverous fellow, with his power of divining a conversation he was surely too far off to hear, must be a relation of the devil.

"That's all right, Jim. Thar's er shake-down over in ther corner big enough for two. You an' the Greaser kin lie down thar. I'll find another place near ther door for myself. It'll soon be daylight, an' ther best thing we kin do is ter take three or four hours' sleep afore we try ter do any business."

"Good idee, Mat."

"Caramba! Eet ees," acquiesced Guerillo.

"Tumble in, then."

Mat Clark was rather shorter in his speech now, in his own place than when one of a company in camp. He was on his native heath, now, as it were.

Jim Townley and the Mexican exchanged a lightning glance—not unseen by Mat, however, and threw themselves, simultaneously, upon the mattress in the corner, with plenty of blankets, that Mat had referred to as a shakedown."

The two men did not make a pretty pair, as they lay in a corner, hemmed in by a heavy bench and a large tub that Mat used for all sorts of purposes, from taking a bath to making bread in.

Perhaps Mat Clark thought so, as he looked over at them. Certainly a sinister sneer passed over his yellow face as he turned away, and dragging out another mattress and two blankets from beneath the table, made up a bed for himself across the door.

Then out went the lamp, and in the black darkness Jim Townley and Guerillo heard their host stretching himself with many a grunt and scuffle, which in due time died off into a steady monotonous snore, announcing that the good man was asleep.

It is to be presumed that the two other men slept, too. Not a sound save their regular breathing was heard for several hours, and they both seemed to enjoy the comfort of Mat Clark's "shake-down" to the very utmost.

A thin stream of sunlight coming through a crack of the door fell upon a recumbent figure across the door, as Guerillo awaking from his sleep all at once, looked around him into the gloom of the cabin and rapidly brought his thoughts into usable shape.

"Caramba! He there! Val, why not I do eet now. Jeem vill like eet, an' we can do without heem now. Caramba! I do eet!"

The Mexican sat up in bed and tried to see whether his companion was asleep or not. He dared not speak for fear of awakening Mat, and he found that it was impossible to distinguish his features.

"Caramba! Vish I know!" he mused.

Carefully and lightly he passed his delicate fingers over the face of Townley.

"Caramba! I not know whether he sleep now. I feel more."

He did feel more. His long, lithe fingers touched the eyes of his companion, which were certainly shut, and then passed down to his mouth.

"Ow-ow!"

A suppressed but earnest howl gave token that Jim Townley's teeth were sharp and strong, and that the Mexican had put his fingers into a dangerous place.

He managed to drag his fingers away, and Jim went on snoring.

"Caramba! I do eet now! I not wait any more!" muttered Guerillo.

Evidently he had some fell purpose in view, and that purpose he was determined to carry out, in spite of all opposition and danger.

Like a snake, he crawled from the mattress by the side of Jim Townley and reached the middle of the floor, where he lay for a moment listening!

Not a sound save the breathing of the two sleepers!

Slowly and silently he made his way toward the door where the form of Mat Clark was apparent in the thin shaft of light.

Still no movement on the part of the unconscious sleeper!

Guerillo had a long knife in his hand, and he gripped it with deadly purpose in his white, strong fingers, as he prepared for a spring.

Suddenly, gathering all his strength, he leaped, like a wild beast, full upon the recumbent figure, lying prone and helpless before the door.

Up went the knife, shining for a moment in the shaft of light. Then there was a thud, and the blade was buried deeply in the prostrate form.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAW'S ICY HAND.

FOR nearly a minute after the Mexican's knife had accomplished its fell purpose there was not a sound to be heard above the heavy breathing of the assassin himself.

He was not excited over committing a murder. He had done such things before. But there was a ghostly gloom in the place, and he had not been sure whether or not Jim Townley knew what he was doing, and he felt somehow as if supernatural vengeance might overtake him before daylight entered the cabin.

"Caramba! I struck hard!" he muttered, his dry lips almost refusing to form the words. "I keel him!"

He slowly drew himself to his full height, his stiff knees seeming actually to crack with the operation, and stepped back a little from where he knew his victim was lying, stark and cold.

Hardly had he drawn himself up, when, with a rattle and a bang, the door opened, letting in a flood of daylight, shining full upon the lank form, and yellow, leathery face of Mat Clark.

"Caramba!" yelled the Mexican, falling on the floor flat upon his face.

Mat Clark, who was standing in the doorway, and who it was, in fact, that had opened the door, laughed with a sort of bony chuckle:

"What's the matter, Guerillo? Ain't yer slept well? Seems ez ef yer might hev hed er nightmare or something. Git up hyar an' look 'bout yer. I hev er mighty fine view from my front door. I kin tell yer."

"Mat?" groaned the Mexican, without uncovering his face.

"Wal?"

"Are you alive? Caramba! Ees eet you?"

Mat chuckled again.

"You bet I air alive. Sleepin' er few hours don't kill me. You're crazy, Guerillo!"

He stepped outside the cabin, after unfastening the shutters at the window, and gave the Mexican a chance to recover himself.

Guerillo, on his part, slowly lifted his face from the floor, and timidly glanced toward the door, where his knife was still sticking in a long pillow, filled with mosquito grass, which Mat Clark had thrown down before the door to keep out draughts.

Guerillo picked himself up, drew the knife from the pillow, stuck it in his boot, and, with a long sigh, gave utterance to his favorite imprecation:

"Caramba!"

"Wish you'd larn some other word," growled Townley, turning himself over, with a yawn.

"Caramba!"

"You durned, yaller-skinned skunk, ef I thought you wuz trying ter insult me, I'd put a hole in yer!" howled Townley, in a rage, as he sat up in his bed and pointed his revolver at the Mexican.

"Car—"

The word was only just begun when a bullet whistled close to the Mexican's head, and out through the doorway.

"Thet thar word'll kill yer yit, now, Guerillo. You mark my words," remarked Jim, oracularly, as he replaced the empty cartridge in his pistol, and arose to his feet.

The Mexican did not answer, and the other went out to the spring for his morning ablutions. He found Mat Clark there, and the two men

bathed their hands and faces in the limpid water in a friendly manner that was little in accordance with the sentiments heretofore expressed by Jim Townley for his sepulchral-looking host.

Breakfast over—and of which the three men partook of together as happily as if they were sworn brothers—Mat said:

"Jim?"

"Wal?"

"Hedn't we better be gittin' right back on our tracks ter try an' git thar paper?"

"Cert."

"Right quick, too."

"Yes."

"What's yer plan, Jim?"

"Got ter see what ther other fellers mean ter do, I s'pose?"

"S'pose so."

"Well, hedn't you an' ther Greaser better stay hyar an' keep house while I run back and prospect, kinder?" insinuated Mat, with his ugliest grin.

Townley looked at him for a moment, and then apparently seeing something in Mat's eyes that did not please him, he brought his fist down on the table with a tremendous thump:

"No!" he said, in quiet, but emphatic tone. "Ef thar is any prospectin' ter de done, Jim Townley will do it himself. See?"

"Yes, Jim," responded Mat submissively.

"An' what do say, Guerillo?" added Townley, turning suddenly on the Mexican.

Guerillo was just rolling a cigarette, but he spilled the tobacco and tore the paper in his agitation at finding himself addressed, and could only manage to splutter a "Caramba!" much to the contemptuous wrath of his partner, Townley.

"Thet Greaser makes me tired," he muttered. "Ef he wuzn't sich a useful man in er scrap, or when any important little job hez ter be done when it don't do fer er white man ter be seen."

The conference did not last much longer. Jim had made up his mind that he would go back to see what Robert and the rest of them were doing, and it was of no use trying to hold him back.

Mat Clark produced a bowie-knife for him, and gave him a good supply of cartridges for his six-shooter, and Jim felt that he was pretty well heeled.

"I hev er Winchester, too, Jim, ef yer'd like ter take it," observed Mat, as the other stepped to the doorway ready to start.

"No. It's too big. I don't know what kind uv climbing an' crawlin' I may hev ter do, and it 'ud be in my way. Sides, any shootin' ez hez ter be done will be at close range and fer therer revolver ez good enough."

"Ef ye'r gone too long, we'll come after yer, Jim," cried Mat, as Townley marched through the thick undergrowth on his way back to the mouth of the cave wherein he had left the detective and his friends prisoners to all intents and purposes.

"All right, Mat. But I won't be too long. All you and the Greaser hev ter do is ter be ready to shoot durned quick ef thar should be any scrap come up," was the reply, in confident tones.

As soon as Townley had disappeared, Mat walked back into the cabin, placed a chair near the table, and seating himself, cocked his feet on the table, with the Winchester rifle he had offered to Townley resting easily in his left hand, so that his right forefinger lay on the trigger.

The Greaser was seated on the opposite side of the table, smoking a cigarette.

For a moment the two men looked straight into each other's eyes.

Only once was there a movement on either side, and that was when the Mexican raised his right hand to twirl the end of his waxed mustache, and Mat Clark brought the Winchester up so that the muzzle covered exactly the center of his companion's forehead.

"Beg yer pardon, Guerillo," said Mat, politely, when he saw that there was no hostile purpose in the movement of the other.

"Caramba! You too suspecious!" grunted Guerillo with a sneer that showed a narrow line of white teeth beneath the black mustache.

"Hardly, I think, Guerillo," returned Mat Clark, composedly.

There was another pause, during which Guerillo made and lighted a fresh cigarette, and Mat Clark showed his familiarity with the use of a Winchester by twisting it in a dozen different directions without ever letting the muzzle point away from his companion. Then Mat said:

"Guerillo?"

"Well?"

"You tried to rub me out last night."

"Caramba! I—"

"Don't lie about it, Guerillo. We both know that yer tried it, but ez it didn't work, why, that didn't make no pertick'ler difference."

"Caramba!"

The Mexican used this word to express a thousand different meanings. This time it was a protest in a spirit of injured innocence.

"Now, Guerillo," continued Clark, in an easy, argumentative manner, "I want ter explain ter yer that it ain't no good yer tryin'

nothin' uv that kind. I'm too old er bird ter be caught by any yaller Greaser. I'm in this hyar scheme ter win, an' I'm goin' ter win."

"Caramba!" interpolated the Mexican, in a tone that implied he wished his companion luck.

"Yes, I'm in ter win. I—I—" Mat had lost the thread of his lecture by the Mexican's interruption, but he picked it up in due course, and went along swimmingly: "I could hev put er bullet inter you ez easily ez nothin', when you wuz crawlin' 'bout ther floor uv ther cabin, but I didn't do it 'cause I didn't want ter hev no man's death on my mind 'cept it 'uz necessary, fer one thing, an' another thing wuz that it wuz fun ter watch yer sneakin' around, gittin' ready to dig yer knife inter that old piller by ther door!"

Mat testified his enjoyment of the recollection by a loud "Ha! ha! ha!" that stretched his leathery countenance until it looked like an old driving-glove.

"Caramba!"

"Wal, now, Guerillo, I dunno ez I shall let you hev anything ter do with this hyar scheme."

"Caramba! Why not?"

"I don't like ther way you hev been behavin', an' I know ez you don't like me."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly, but Mat Clark shook his head determinedly.

"Don't give me no guff 'bout it, Guerillo. Thet won't do no good."

"Caramba!" as if he would have said: "My very dear friend!"

"Git over thar, Guerillo!" suddenly commanded Mat, rising to his feet and bringing the muzzle of the Winchester very near the Mexican's face.

"Where?"

"Over ter ther middle of ther room."

"Caramba!"

"Yes. Git!"

It was not easy for Guerillo to know exactly the purpose of his companion, but the change from malicious banter to fierce purpose was too marked not to be seen at once.

Mat Clark meant mischief now, and the Mexican knew it.

Guerillo backed away from the table, and then stooped slightly, with his right hand reaching toward the top of his boot.

"Hands up!" thundered Clark.

Up went the Mexican's hands as if they had been worked by electricity.

"Yer want ter keep yer hand away from that boot uv yours, an' I don't want ter see yer stealin' around ter yer belt either," observed Mat, quietly. "I know all 'bout that thar knife in your boot, an' that yer hev er revolver in yer belt. But yer ain't goin' ter use 'em on me, an' yer may ez well make up yer mind ter that right away."

The Mexican was thoroughly cowed now. He had backed away from the table with his hands up, and now stood in the middle of the room.

Mat watched him, and seemed to be making a mental calculation of something of which Guerillo was the principal figure.

"Take half er step ter ther right, Guerillo. That's it. Now move a few inches back. Good!"

The Mexican had obeyed the directions, although he had not the slightest idea why they were given, unless his eccentric companion were placing him carefully in good position so that he could shoot him down with ease. This, however, he did not fear. He felt sure, somehow, that his life was not in immediate danger, whatever it might be afterward.

"Now you look very well, Guerillo!" observed Clark, in satisfied tones, after he had inspected his guest—or prisoner—from every point of view.

"Caramba! What you do, Meester Clark?"

"I'll show you!"

Click! Clark had touched a small button on the wall by the side of the door, and instantaneously Guerillo sunk through a hole in the floor, which closed over his head in the shape of two doors that had separated in the middle, and let him down, coming back to their places automatically.

Mat Clark emitted a loud guffaw.

"Wal, Guerillo, I guess you're safe enough now till I want yer. You kin wander 'bout thar all yelike, but I don't think you'll find yer way out till I say ther word! Ha! ha! ha! It's funny!"

Mat Clark evidently enjoyed it with all his heart for he fell back in his chair, and laughed again and again till his sides ached, and he was obliged to throw his Winchester on the floor to give him a better chance to indulge in his merriment.

He was shaking and rocking in his chair, when suddenly his mirth was brought to a close by two revolvers being placed under his nose, while a very official voice said:

"Mat Clark, you are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TOWNLEY STRIKES LUCK.

JIM TOWNLEY went on swiftly for some distance after leaving Mat Clark's cabin.

He had a purpose in view, and his programme was laid out so that he could follow it without

fear of its being very much disturbed. That he was in danger of being shot down on sight by the detective, he knew, but he trusted to the difficulty of getting out of the cave, now that the bridge had been removed, being sufficient to keep the detective and the others in there for a few hours at least. It is needless to say that he did not know anything about old Silas Laurent's crib immediately above it, and the means thus afforded for getting out of the cave that had for a long time been under the dominion of the Mexican and himself.

"He says he won't give me no more chances, does he?" growled Townley to himself. "Wal, he don't need to, nuther. I don't want ter take nothin' from him ag'in. He puts on too many lugs over it, an' it's er fight ter ther death now."

He took a circuitous course toward the cave, bearing to the right from the trail he had followed with Mat Clark and the Mexican.

He was thoroughly familiar with the whole district, and even when plunging through the thickest of the forest, knew where he was at all times.

"Ha! What's that?"

His quick ear had caught a sound that made him pause and place his hand upon his revolver.

It was a girl's voice. He could not distinguish what it said, but the clear tones came distinctly on the morning air, although evidently a considerable distance away.

"Um! Ef that thar ain't Lucy Laurent then I don't know nothin'," muttered Jim. "I seen her gittin' down inter ther cave with that thar rope. But I don't know how she could git out ther same way."

He plodded on, pushing the branches aside as he walked, and keeping a sharp lookout for possible surprises.

"She's cl'ar grit, though," he added, following the train of his thoughts. "Durned ef I ever seen sich er gal. She ain't 'fraid uv nothin', not even uv me."

He shook his head in admiring wonder, and walked on in silence for a time. Then his thoughts found voice again:

"Swore ez she'd hang me, too, so she did. An' I b'lieve she'll do it, ef I don't marry her. Wal, I'll hev ter marry her. Thet's all 'bout it."

Having settled this matter in his own mind, Jim gave all his attention to the business on hand, and struck forth boldly toward where he expected to find his enemies.

He knew now that Lucy Laurent had managed to get out of the cave somehow, and it was therefore only reasonable to suppose that the men in the party had done the same. He might fall among them at any moment.

There was nothing for it but to go on, however. He had everything at stake—his life, his love, and a fortune, and the only way to save all these was to circumvent this mysterious little Boston Professor, who seemed to hold everything that Jim Townley wanted in the hollow of his hand.

He had struck a clear spot now. It was a small plateau on the very summit of the mountain, and, so far as the eye could see, was at the edge of precipice that bounded it in the direction he wanted to take.

"Must hev got er little bit out uv my course hyar, seems ter me. Thet cave is over thar ter ther left, on ther other side uv this hyar canyon. I kin walk three or four miles around, I s'pose, 'less I find some way uv gittin' across hyar."

He walked swiftly toward the left, pushing the pines aside, and taking no notice of the way in which the branches flew back and cut his face. He had a steady purpose in view, and he pursued it without allowing anything to turn him from it.

At last he stopped.

"Hyar's ther place. Thought ez I hedn't forgot it. It's a long time since I wuz hyar, but I don't fergit any place ez I've once knowed."

He had reached a spot where the bank on which he stood shot out to a point, bringing it within a few yards of that on the opposite side of the canyon. Most likely, in years gone by, there had been a road across. Then, there may have been one of those mighty convulsions of nature that take place in these solitudes from time to time, which had riven it across.

"Been er yarthquake, I s'pose. But I wish ther' hedn't. It would hev been mighty convenient ter me at this hyar stage uv ther game," muttered Jim, as he made his preparations for crossing the chasm.

He had not heard any more of Lucy Laurent's voice since the moment in which he had recognized it some time before, but he kept a sharp lookout for surprises, notwithstanding.

"One don't never know what may happen," was his philosophical reflection, "an' both that detective an' Lucy hez blood in their eyes fer me."

There was a large pine growing on the very edge of the jutting crag, one of whose branches almost overhung the opposite bank. Between the two banks there was the chasm, thousands of feet deep, with only the tree to make a bridge.

For it was evident, from Townley's movements, that he intended to use the tree for that purpose.

"It's risky, an' I ain't sure ez that thar limb

is ez sound ez it might be. Howsoever, I've got ter go it. I ain't er goin' round no furder."

Feeling that his revolver was firmly in his belt, and tucking his jean trowsers more securely into his boots, he began to climb the tree. The sharp knots and thorns made it no easy task, but he was very active in spite of his coarse thick-set build, and had soon reached the branch overhanging the chasm.

As he began to climb out on the limb it bent lower and lower, until when he was half-way along its length, the extremity was considerably below the opposite bank.

"This hyar thing wabbles more'n it used ter," he grumbled. "Be er bad endin' ter this hyar bizness ef I wuz ter go head-first inter the canyon."

He crawled a little further, and the limb sagged down two-feet.

"Say! This hyar thing is gettin' mighty interestin'. Jim Townley, I think p'raps you'd better be goin' back."

He half turned on the limb, and tried to look back.

Too late!

The branch was going lower and lower with a series of cracks that to the experienced ear of the miner, proclaimed that it was breaking off.

He clutched convulsively at anything, but there was nothing for his hands to reach. He was helpless.

Down, down, went the branch, with Jim Townley clinging to it like a wild animal lying down to sleep.

There was one last loud crack, and Townley found himself shot off the branch into space, and then into a mass of something soft that got into his eyes and mouth and choked and gagged him, while the limb of the tree whirled down the canyon to be carried away by the roaring, tumbling water tearing itself into foam on the sharp rocks 4,000 feet below.

"Saved somehow, by gum!" spluttered Townley, as he tried to get the earth and sand out of his eyes. "Whar in thunder am I, anyhow?"

Jim Townley might well wonder, for the experience he had passed through was perhaps never that of mortal man before.

As soon as he could get his eyes clear, he saw that he had been thrown by the force of his fall against the face of the cliff opposite that on which he had stood, and that the concussion had been so great as to actually thrust him into the comparatively soft earth far enough to prevent his following the branch of the pine into the awful chasm.

He was in anything but a safe position, for the only resting place for his feet was the small ledge in the earth made by his being pushed into it by the fall. In other words, the cliff had been perfectly flat before, and he was merely stuck in it, like a clove in an orange.

"Wal, I don't know ez I'm ez well off ez I'd hev been ef I'd stayed whar I wuz," he muttered. "I'd like ter know how I'm er goin' ter git out uv this. Ef I move I'll go down inter ther canyon an' ef I keep still I'll only starve fer awhile an' tumble down thar afterward. I'm in ez' bad shape ez I ever wuz in my life, I reckon!"

Familiarized with danger, as he was, Townley could not express a thrill of horror as the full significance of his situation forced itself upon him.

"Tain't no use. Ef I hev ter die, I'll make er struggle for it, anyhow," he exclaimed. "P'raps I might dig er little further inter ther bank, so ez ter hev er better hold."

One of his arms—the left—was already thrust into the soft earth up to the elbow, and this was his principal means of holding on. The other hand was loose, and had been utilized to pull the earth and sand out of his eyes and mouth.

The soil seemed to be more earth than sand, although there was a considerable proportion of the latter in it. It seemed to be soft in the one spot, too, for Jim noticed that in the immediate vicinity it was rocky, without any indication of the softness against which, fortunately for him, he had been hurled.

Suddenly, something seemed to strike him, and he acted upon the idea, whatever it might be, without loss of time.

Forcing his left arm further and more firmly into the bank, he began to claw away at the earth with his right like a madman.

Handful after handful of earth was pulled out and thrown down into the canyon.

"By gum, it's er comin'. I b'lieve I've struck something," he panted, as he clawed at the earth, and at one pulled dislodged a solid cake twice as big as his head and sent it into the chasm.

He thrust his left arm further in, to give himself a hold, and clawed away more vigorously than ever. Soon he found himself with a good-sized cave in which to work, and it was no longer necessary for him to hold on with his left arm while he worked. He could use both hands and both feet, and be literally "walked" through the wall of earth into the bowels of the mountain.

The earth was soft straight through. Where he would bring up he did not know, but his expectation was to tunnel his way up to the surface, so that he could get to the place he was

aiming at originally, although with more delay than he had anticipated.

"Wal, ef this hyar ain't one uv ther greatest streaks ez ever I struck. Punching my way through ther solid mountain with no notion whether I'll come out in Arizona or Colorado, or—or—China. But thar's nothin' fer it but ter go ahead, I s'pose."

This reflection seemed to nerve him to fresh exertions, and he worked away at the earth and sand like a steam shovel. What struck him as rather peculiar was the fact that the roof of the cave he was making remained solid in spite of his digging away the earth that appeared to support it.

"I s'pose thar must be a reg'lar solid framework of rock around this hyar hole," he muttered. "Strange things in natur', ain't ther?"

Philosophy was not Jim Townley's strong characteristic in general, but it came to his assistance now. So much so that an idea struck him that he proceeded to carry out with the energy that distinguished most of his actions.

Something caused him to adopt a new plan for digging through. He was now a considerable distance from the face of the cliff, and one would have thought, without knowing how soft and easy the earth was, that it had taken at least four pairs of hands to make such an excavation.

"Wal, hyar's fer er try, but I don't know whether it will go!"

Thus speaking, Jim Townley placed his back against the earth at the end of the cavern he had made, and sticking his heels into the ground so as to obtain a good purchase, braced himself and shoved with all his might.

For a moment there was a trembling at his back that made Jim's rugged countenance break into a broad grin, in spite of the fragments of earth and sand that dropped upon his head and face, and down his neck. Then the trembling became more pronounced, and more earth came down upon his head, until he stood in the midst of a little heap of dirt that came above his knees.

"Thet don't matter. It gives me time to brace up ag'in, don't you see," panted Jim.

He gave another tremendous shove, and then, with a trembling that was more like an earthquake than ever, the whole back wall of the cave gave way together, and Jim Townley turned a back somerset into he knew not where, while several hundred weight of earth fell upon him and buried him completely.

With much spluttering and some profanity, Jim dug his way out, and tried to realize where he was.

In the distance, the light from the hole by which he had entered, looked like the entrance of a long tunnel.

"By gum! I thought ez thar wuz somethin' uv this kind. I've heerd tell uv this hyar place, but I wuz never able to locate it afore. It 'ud be funny ef I'd struck it by accident, after all."

He walked along into the interior of the cave, which now showed itself to be a regular tunnel, higher in most places than that Jim Townley had scooped out with his hands.

Some mysterious light that came from he knew not where, glittered on the walls, which were rich with gold and silver. The precious metals lay in great veins, and it seemed almost as if one could take a pickax and cut it out ready to be worked up into anything desired.

"By ther Lord, this will assay \$2,000 to the ton, at least," said Jim. "My, what er strike. If this hyar ain't ther famous property ez we've been lookin' fer all this time, my name ain't Jim Townley. I don't care much whether I git that paper or not now."

He walked on, still with the mysterious light that he could not account for, showing him the way, and then the tunnel turned short around to the right.

"All right! Wharever it goes, I'm ready ter foller it. Thet's what I'm hyar fer," he thought. "I don't mean ter lose sight uv it now."

He whisked around the corner, noticing that the vein of gold seemed to get even larger on each side, and that nuggets lay loose along the ground here and there, when a voice broke upon his ear.

"Lucy Laurent, by jingo," he murmured. "Whar is she, I wonder?"

He looked along the tunnel and saw Boston Bob, the Sport Detective, standing in the middle of the tunnel, looking toward the left, as if there were another passageway in that direction.

Jim Townley dropped flat upon the ground, hiding behind a projection in the wall, that, fortunately for him, happened to exist at that particular point.

CHAPTER XXII.

ROBERT SCORES A POINT AND LOSES IT.

ROBERT had not seen Jim Townley.

The detective was too much occupied in looking in the opposite direction to be aware of the presence of the desperado.

He was not alone. Lucy Laurent and her father, Dude Grier, and Bess Morrow were all with him, and all were interested in the discovery that he had made of the great gold mine that was to be the property of Lucy Laurent so soon as she had gone to Chicago to prove her

claim to the satisfaction of those astute lawyers, Messrs. Sharpe, Knowlton & Bright.

We had better go back to find how the detective and his companions had found their way to the cavern in which they had been seen by Jim Townley.

As we know, it was easy enough to get out of the lower cave, belonging to Jim Townley, into that owned by Silas. The trap-door had been utilized, and with a little struggle all had been safely landed in Silas Laurent's cave.

The trap was fastened down again, and by the dim light of a lantern all stood waiting for the next move of the detective.

He walked around the cave, with the three precious papers in his hand, as if looking for something.

"Silas," he said at last.

"Wal?"

"How long have you had possession of this place?"

"About a year."

"Who showed it to you?"

"No one. I found it myself."

"Ha! Now let me show you something."

He walked to the rear of the cave and asked Silas to bring the light.

Then he took the three papers and spread them one by one on the floor until he had them properly arranged. He studied the completed map for some minutes, following certain lines with his fingers, and making careful comparisons between different parts of the map.

At last he folded it up with a satisfied air, and put it in his pocketbook, in his inside coat pocket.

He did not arise from his knees, but, looking up at Silas asked him whether he had a spade handy.

"Yes."

"Very well. Bring it here. Now, dig."

He pointed to a certain spot in the floor, close to the rocky wall, where he had been kneeling, and where some loose earth had been kicked about as if by accident.

"Dig!" repeated Silas.

"Yes."

The detective gave the order in the manner of one accustomed to being obeyed, and then turning away from Silas, took out his ever-useful little whisk-brush, and flicked the dust from his costume until he felt that he was fit for a promenade on Broadway. Robert Roberts had that peculiar faculty, possessed by some men, of always looking neat, no matter where he might be, and no one would have thought, to see him now, with his light overcoat thrown open to display his immaculate shirt bosom and collar, and with his white cuffs coming down partly over a no less white hand, that he had been through so many rough experiences in a wild part of Southern Arizona.

It was noticeable that all of his companions had the greatest confidence in this mild-looking little man, with his gold spectacles on his nose and his calm manner of gazing through the glasses at his surroundings.

Silas dug away according to orders for several minutes, and soon had a heap of dirt at his side.

"Phew! This hyar's harder work than I thought. Guess I must be gittin' old," he exclaimed, pausing.

"Let me help," said Dude Grier, and taking the shovel from the old man's hand he went vigorously to work until he had a good-sized hole and a large heap of dirt by the side of that turned up by Silas.

Then his spade touched something hard and gave forth a sharp ring.

"Wait a minute," commanded the detective. "Let me see whether we are going along all right."

Once more he brought out the map and spread it on the ground, where he could examine it closely by the light of the lantern.

"Good, so far," he whispered to himself. "We are on the right track."

He refolded the map and replaced it in his pocket. Then he thrust his arm full-length into the hole made by Silas and Dude and felt for the hard substance against which Dude Grier's spade had struck.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, with a broad smile of satisfaction. "I have it."

Those around him saw that he was struggling with something, and then, as he pulled with all his might, they saw what it was. His hand came to the surface grasping a large iron ring to which a chain was fastened to something in a hole.

"What is it?" asked Lucy.

"That chain is fastened to your fortune," answered the detective, with a smile.

"Is that so? Then we'd better pull it out, eh?"

"Yes. All lend a hand."

Every one took hold of the chain and ring, and under the direction of the detective, pulled with all their might.

The result was peculiar. A large section of the wall came out with a crash, revealing a heavy wooden door, carefully imbedded in earth, that had been so ingeniously packed as to look like solid rock.

The door was nailed up with great spikes, and it was evident that it had been ingeniously hidden and securely fastened, so that it should

never be discovered save by those who had been given the key to the mystery.

"A hatchet, Silas," cried the detective.

It did not take the stylish-looking little man long to draw out the spikes when once he had the hatchet in his hand, for there was a great deal of sinewy strength in his white hands, to say nothing of the fact that he possessed more mechanical dexterity than might have been expected from his dudish appearance. But then Boston Bob was always surprising his acquaintances in one way or another.

"Look out!"

Every one started back, and then, with one final tug by the detective the heavy door fell outward to the floor of the cave, and a rush of cold air proclaimed that there was a large tunnel on the other side, leading no one could see where.

"Good, so far. Now, all follow me."

He stepped inside, and then stopped.

"You are all armed?" he asked.

"In course we are," replied Lucy. "But what do we want with weapons in hyar? You don't expect ter meet no one in this hyar hole, do yer?"

"No. But I make it a rule to be ready for anything, when I can," was Bob's sage response. "Come on."

He plunged boldly into the darkness, with the others close at his heels.

"Whar air we goin'?" asked Bess Morrow, who had remained quiet for a long time, although taking a keen interest in all that was going on.

"I don't know yet."

They walked on for perhaps five hundred yards in a straight line. They could not see each other, but as they put out their hands from time to time, they could feel that the walls were comparatively smooth, with only occasional jutting rocks to warn them that they must feel their way to guard them from knocking their heads against unseen obstructions.

Suddenly they all came to a stop.

The detective had brought up against a wall across the end of the tunnel, and found himself to all intents and purposes in a *cul-de-sac*.

But this did not disturb him. He had studied the map closely by the light of the oil lamp before leaving Silas's crib, and he was prepared for this wall.

He passed his hand lightly but carefully all over the wall, and particularly down the sides. Then his finger came in contact with a small knob. Grasping it firmly, he managed to turn it from left to right. Then he pulled.

A dim light streamed upon the explorers, as a door came open in response to the detective's pull, and revealed another opening, light enough for them to be able to distinguish each other's forms, and after awhile, when they got used to the light, their features as well.

When all were through the opening, the detective closed the door, and they walked on.

There were a good many twists and turns, and now they began to see metal shining in the walls, that became more distinct as they progressed, until they saw that there were large solid veins of gold in either wall, while shining lumps of the same metal apparently almost pure lay in their path here and there.

Silas could not repress an exclamation of wonder as he stooped and picked up a nugget and hugged it to his bosom.

"Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Laurent. There are plenty more of them. You need not carry that stuff about with you."

But Silas Laurent kept the nugget, in spite of the detective's remonstrance. His cupidity was too much for him, and he felt that he could not give up this lump of gold even if all around him were to be his.

It was at this particular moment, when the detective had turned to speak to Silas Laurent, that Jim Townley, who had found his way into this rich mine in so peculiar and unexpected a manner, caught sight of Boston Bob.

"I don't know that we need go any further," remarked Bob. "We have found what we were looking for, and now I think the best thing to be done is to get back to Chicago, prove the claim of Miss Laurent, and let her enter upon her property."

"Say, Bob," observed Lucy, placing her hand on the detective's coat-sleeve.

"Well?"

"You jist want ter stow thet, d'ye hear?"

"Stow what?"

"Why thet ez yer wuz givin' me jist now."

"I—I don't understand you," stammered the detective, and it was evident from his look of bewilderment, that he really did not.

"Wal, yer want ter understand me, right quick. I ain't no Miss Laurent now more'n I wuz afore."

"Oho!" exclaimed the detective, as a light broke in upon him.

"Wal, now, I mean what I sez," went on Lucy, who was thoroughly in earnest. "Why ain't I Lucy, ez much ez I wuz afore you found this hyar paper? Why, durn it, I'll hev Dude Grier a-callin' me *Miss Laurent* next. Ef he does, I'll make it so hot fer him he'll wish he'd never been perlite."

"Lucy, you'll always be Lucy to me," put in

the young man. "I shall never call you miss."

"Thet's right, Dude. You're squar' an' I know it," responded the girl, giving his hand a hearty shake.

This little matter settled, all turned to retrace their steps. Arthur Grier and Lucy, between whom a better understanding seemed to exist than ever before, went first. Then came Bess and Silas, and the detective, walking slowly, and apparently in deep thought, brought up the rear.

And behind them, keeping just out of sight, with the aid of the many twists, turns and projections in this rich, glittering gold mine, crawled Jim Townley, with murder and cupidity equally at work in his heart.

They reached the door that separated the gold-mine from the dark tunnel leading to Silas Laurent's cave, and all went through except the detective.

"You all go on. I'll be with you directly," he said. "There is something here I want to look at before I go out."

He closed the door and then walked swiftly back over the way he had come, kicking the loose pieces of ore out of his way, and looking intently at the roof, where the vein of gold extended from the sides in a mass of golden beauty.

Jim Townley had only just time to drop into a recess and hide behind a loose boulder, when the detective passed him, his eyes still fixed upon the ceiling.

"What's he doin' hyar?" growled the desperado. "My, how easy I could draw er bead on him now. I've er notion ter do it, too. No, that would spile all. I know all erbout this hyar crib now, an' I kin git all I want outen it, so I'd be er fool to take chancees uv losin' it just to git even with that durned tenderfoot. I'll let him go."

He had only just come to this magnanimous resolution, when there was the flash of a heavy body before his eyes, and while he was still in a daze a sinewy hand grasped him by the throat and a soft voice purred:

"This is the last time, my friend. I told you what I should do the next time we met."

Jim Townley's natural impulse was to tear himself loose, but he found he had a heavier contract on his hands than he could fill.

Tug and struggle as he would, he could not tear away from this foe, whom he knew too well to expect to show him any mercy now.

Robert had been looking at the ceiling as he walked along, but he had managed to keep an eye on Townley, as, indeed, he had, from the time that the desperado had followed the party in his sly way. There had not been a move on the part of the dark-browed ruffian that had not been noted by the detective, and he was as sure of his man from the very first as he was when he sprung upon him so unexpectedly and pinned him to the ground behind the boulder.

"Let go! Curse yer!" gurgled Townley. "You're chokin' me with yer infernal fingers!"

"It would be a pity to do that, Mr. Townley, because it would be cheating the hangman of his job," answered The Professor, politely, as he relaxed his grasp just the least bit, so as to give the other an opportunity to breathe freer, without allowing him to obtain liberty in any other way.

Townley gasped, and his eyes rolled under his heavy eyebrows in a threatening fashion that the detective perfectly understood, although he could afford to disdain it now.

"You know what I told you last time we met," observed the detective, with that inscrutable smile of his.

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going to do what I said. I'm going to hang you, Mr. Townley, just as surely as I hold you here now at my mercy," went on the detective, as he gave the fellow a shake to emphasize his words.

"Mercy! Yes, that's a lot uv that fer me, I s'pose," growled Townley. "But what are yer goin' ter do with me?"

"I hardly know yet. I wish I'd caught you anywhere but here. It will be awkward to get you out of this place, I'm afraid."

The desperado grinned. Caught as he was, he could enjoy the discomfiture of his captor, for he had been in too many tight places before to lose hope entirely, no matter how dark things might appear.

"Oh, you can laugh, my friend, but you may rest assured I will find some way of getting you to daylight and placing you in the hands of our friend 'Squire Caldwell, until I can make arrangements to get you back to Chicago."

"Chicago?"

"Yes. There are several charges against you there, and I can hang you on almost any of them, to say nothing of the brilliant engagement, in the way of abduction and robbery, that you have played here in Hopeful Gulch."

While talking, the detective had unconsciously loosened his grasp on Townley's throat. Keenly alive to anything that tended to his own advantage, the desperado had noted this, and now, just as The Professor finished speaking, he made a sudden twist and tore himself loose.

For one instant he was free, and his hand shot to his belt to draw his revolver.

He was not quick enough, however. The detective's right fist flew out like a flash of lightning, and catching Townley on the point of the jaw, sent him spinning half a dozen yards and laid him flat upon his back in a very bewildered, disgruntled condition.

The detective sprung forward to catch his foe before he could recover himself, and made him a prisoner once more.

But something else interposed.

A heavy blow on the back of his head stretched him senseless by the side of Jim Townley, while a voice that the desperado recognized at once, and that sounded actually sweet at this juncture, croaked:

"Caramba!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

BESS IN THE TOILS.

MAT CLARK was perhaps the most surprised man in Arizona when he was informed that he was the prisoner of a man whom he had no reason to suppose was anywhere in the vicinity.

He turned short around to see who the individual was that was holding the revolvers under his nose, although he had recognized the voice at first.

"Wal, 'squire, you surprised me," he said, with an attempt at jocularity, as his eyes met those of 'Squire Caldwell.

"Very likely. Ther law hez er way uv surprisin' lots uv people. But that hezn't got anythin' ter do with it. I wanter know ef you air goin' along with me quietly, or whether I'll hev ter git assistance. I hev er posse outside ther cabin hyar."

"You hev?"

"Yes."

The 'squire told this lie with unblushing effrontery. He could not afford to be particular about the truth, he considered, while acting as the only representative of the law in such a place as Hopeful Gulch.

"What am I er prisoner fer?" demanded Mat.

"I left er woman—one Bess Morrow—in your charge, an' you 'lowed her to escape. Thet makes you an accessory to ther murder after ther fact, in ther eyes uv ther law, an' you will hev ter be held to answer."

Mat Clark breathed a sigh of relief. He was afraid that more evidence than Bess Morrow's word had been brought against him, and that he might yet be brought face to face with his crime.

"Wal, 'squire," he said, in a nonchalant tone, "I don't see what I hev ter do with ther escape uv your prisoner. I put her in ther house, an' ef it wuzn't strong enough ter hold her, that's your lookout."

"Mat Clark, don't you 'tempt ter fool with ther law, d'y'e hear? It ain't decent."

The 'squire spoke with a great deal of dignity, but Mat Clark detected a twinkle in his eye that made him think he had some other object in coming there than to arrest him.

"Very well, 'squire. Let's go back, ef you like. But wouldn't it be better fer us to go after Bess Morrow instead of your takin' me back ez er prisoner?"

"Wbar is she?"

"I kin find her."

"You kin?"

"Yes. In time."

"Wal, you'd better do it."

"I wuz just goin' ter when you come in."

"Whar were yer goin'?"

"Come with me an' I'll show yer."

"Mat, it's er go."

The 'squire put his two immense revolvers in his belt and looked about him, while Mat went on, in an easy way:

"Thar's been some strange doin's up hyer sence yesterday, an' I don't know exactly what they are. Thar's some monkey bizness goin' on, though, an' that that little Boston Professor is et ther bottom uv it."

"Who is he?" asked the 'squire, with dignity.

"No one knows jest who he is. But I'll tell yer what I think he is. I believe—"

"Wal, go on."

"I don't like to say, 'cause I'm mebbe wrong," faltered Mat, with an edifying manner of having very strong conscientious scruples.

"In ther name uv ther law, I command yer to tell all yer know," said the 'squire.

"Wal, then, I believe he's an Eastern crook, an' that he's hyar to git possession uv er claim not half er mile from whar we air standing, that belongs to Lucy Laurent."

'Squire Caldwell swelled with official importance as he listened to this declaration of Mat Clark's.

"I'll 'tend ter this matter right away," he announced. "Do you know whar this hyar feller is ter be found?"

"I kin find him."

"Lead on then."

"Now?"

"Yes. Now! No time like the present. An' I'm goin' ter show people that ther law hez ter be respected in Happy Gulch, ef it isn't anywhar' else in Arizona."

Mat did not argue the point any longer.

"Won't yer hev something ter eat an' drink

arter yer walk, 'squire? I hev some hot coffee hyar."

The 'squire accepted the hospitality, and was soon deep into a hearty meal of fried pork and bread, washed down by several cups of coffee, as if there were nothing more important to claim his attention.

This gave Mat Clark time to think out his plan of action. He had dropped the Mexican down the trap, and he was by no means sure what that eccentric individual might do if he was released. At the same time, he had made up his mind that it would be well to turn the detective over to the 'squire as soon as possible, and that the most likely way of bringing that purpose to a consummation would be by utilizing the secret passage beneath his house, of which he alone was cognizant, and which he had not thought it worth while to reveal to Jim Townley.

But what was he to do with Guerillo? He had dropped him into the hole, but it was only a small chamber, the same size as the cabin above, and it was not likely that he had discovered the secret entrance to the passage that led away through the mountain to a place that even Mat Clark had not explored yet.

He had only discovered it a few weeks before, and although he was sure it was part of an underground system that led to one of the several lost claims known to exist in the neighborhood, he had never had an opportunity yet of following it to the end.

"I hate ter let this feller see what I may find," he muttered, as he stood behind the puffing 'squire, and noticed what a splendid appetite he had, "but thar ain't no way out uv it, ez I kin see."

"Wal, Mat, ready?" asked the 'squire, gulping down the last of his coffee and looking at his host.

"Yes."

"All right. Let's start."

Mat went to the center of the room and dropped the trap-doors.

"What yer doin' thar, Mat?"

"I'll show you, directly."

He spoke abruptly, for he was gazing into the apartment below, and as his eyes got used to the gloom, he saw that it was empty.

"Gone!" he muttered. "Then he must hev found his way into the passage. Now thar'll be trouble."

He leaped lightly into the cellar, and found confirmation of his suspicions.

Not only had the Mexican disappeared, but the doorway by which he had escaped from the cellar was open in one corner, telling mutely of the direction he had taken.

Mat brought a ladder from one side of the cellar, and placed it against the opening above.

"Now, 'squire."

"Wal?"

"Jist come down the ladder, an' then I'll show yer ther way ter whar we want ter go."

'Squire Caldwell's red face appeared at the edge of the hole as he looked curiously at Mat Clark.

"Mat?"

"Wal?"

"I dunno ez this hyar is exactly in accordance with ther statoots. I should like ter hev er chance ter read 'em afore I go any furder with this."

"But yer hevn't got ther statoots hyar, hev yer?"

"No. But—"

"Wal, then, I wouldn't bother 'bout 'em," broke in Mat, irreverently. "Jist come down hyar, an' I guess we kin catch that Boston Professor, an' p'raps find Bess Morrow too."

"Think so, Mat?"

"I do."

"Then hyar goes."

The 'squire was rather stout and clumsy, and it was with some exertion and much puffing that he managed to descend the ladder and join Mat Clark in the cellar.

He had not pulled himself together, as it was, after the descent, when he saw the two trap-doors fly to their places again, leaving him in black darkness.

"Say, Mat, no tricks with ther law! It won't do. It's ag'in' ther statoots," he remonstrated in a very serious tone of voice.

"All right, 'squire. Come with me," announced Mat, taking one of his companion's hands and leading him to the open doorway in the corner.

Mat had been some distance along the passage, and knew that there would be light after a while, so he did not mind the pitchy darkness they encountered at first.

"This hyar's a mighty ondignified thing, seems ter me," grumbled the 'squire.

"Wait till we catch that feller, an' it'll seem all right," was Mat's response.

How far they walked the 'squire could not tell. He felt so utterly helpless in the dark that he could only trust blindly to his companion, and hope for the best.

At last there were a few faint gleams of light to be discerned some distance before them—light that gradually became brighter, until they found themselves in part of the gold mine that has been described before, where the veins of nearly pure metal were to be seen on either side

and overhead, shining in the mysterious light that could not be explained, but that was too evident to be denied.

There were many ramifications of this mine, and the passage the 'squire and Mat were now pursuing was running parallel to that in which the detective had fallen in with Jim Townley and Guerillo.

Had they happened to take the same path, 'Squire Caldwell and Mat Clark would have fallen across the detective in a very interesting situation with Townley and the Mexican, and there might have been a different story to tell.

Mat Clark carefully repressed evidences of satisfaction, but he felt a thrill of joy run through his frame as he noted the wealth on every side of him.

"It's worth fighting fer," he thought, "an' I'll fight fer it, ef I hev ter. Ter think that all this wuz jist in my reach, an' I didn't know it."

"We don't seem ter be gittin' anywhar near that Professor," remarked the 'squire, as he plodded on without taking much notice of his surroundings. "This whole thing is not in accordance with ther law an' ther statoots. I'm afraid I shall git back ter town pretty soon, an' you'll hev ter come with me, Mat."

"All right, 'squire. Ef you'll come a little furder we shall find some one, I'm sure," replied Mat. "I know that we're on ther right track."

As stated before, there were a great many twists and turns in this mine, and the two men passed many places where the passage shot off at an angle to another quarter, although the main avenue went straight ahead.

It was at one of these places, where the light had faded to some extent, leaving the cavern almost in deep gloom, that Mat Clark suddenly felt a pair of strong arms around his neck, and found himself on the ground, helpless in a sturdy grasp.

"Wh—what is this?" he gasped.

"Confound your ugly pictur'! You can't keep away, can't yer. I thought you had all yer wanted last night when you tried to play dirt in Silas Laurent's house. An' now, hyar you are again."

Mat recognized Bess Morrow's voice, and he knew it was Bess Morrow's powerful arms that held him in anything but a loving clasp.

"Bess!" he gurgled.

"Shut yer mouth, yer white-livered cur!" was the gracious response as she closed the fingers of her right hand on his windpipe.

Mat did not shut his mouth. In fact, the squeeze on his throat forced him to open it. But he did not say anything more, which was probably what the young lady meant.

She was blessed with more strength than is usually given to young women, and besides she had a grudge against this gentleman that nerved her to increased exertions in the way of bringing him to time.

'Squire Caldwell was rather a slow thinking, as well as slow-acting man, and he did not comprehend the situation immediately.

Then it dawned upon him that this proceeding was in contravention of the law and the statoots, and he expressed his disapproval of it in his own dignified and impressive way.

"Bess, quit that!"

"Shut up, you old fool!" was Bess's response.

"Bess! Do yer know who you air a-talkin' to?" demanded the 'squire, almost breathless with indignation.

"Yes, I do," answered the girl, as she gave Mat Clark another shake that made his teeth rattle.

"Wal, Bess, I'm sorry ter hev ter take extreme measures with yer, but I'm goin' ter do it," said the 'squire, slowly.

"You air? What yer goin' ter do?"

The 'squire drew his two big pistols from his belt and pointed them straight at Bess Morrow's head.

"What er big fool you air!" was Bess Morrow's rather unexpected comment on this proceeding.

The 'squire dropped his arms to his sides, pistols and all. He hardly knew what to make of this girl, who took no more notice of pistols than if they were old corn-stalks.

"Bess!"

"Yes."

"Drop yer hands from that feller. You can't stand thar hugging him all day."

"Hugging him!" repeated Bess, with blazing eyes. "Git down thar, yer brute!"

She threw Mat from her with all her force, and he tumbled headlong to the ground, almost upsetting the 'squire.

"Now, Bess, come along."

"Whar to?"

"Down ter town. You know ez thar is er charge ag'in' yer uv havin' killed yer father—"

"An' do you believe that, Squire Caldwell?" interrupted the girl, indignantly.

"It don't matter what I believe," answered the 'squire. "You see, what I believe hez nothin' ter do with it. It's ther law ez we must consider. An' in ther eyes uv ther law you air charged with murder."

The 'squire wiped his face on a large cotton handkerchief as he concluded this lucid harangue, for it made him hot to explain knotty points of law, such as he considered this to be,

Then he touched Bess on the shoulder and motioned to her to march along.

The girl hesitated for a moment. She knew that Lucy and her father and Dude Grier were not far away, and she would like to have told them that she was going away.

"I dunno. Guess I'd better not!" she reflected. "Might get them into er snarl. I can't help them any now, an' they'll know whar I am when they git back ter town."

"Now, Bess," hinted the 'squire.

"All right, I'm ready."

"Mat, you walk on ther other side uv her," observed the 'squire.

Mat had arisen by this time, and was trying to twist his leathery countenance into a propitiatory smile. It must be remembered that he was in love with Bess Morrow.

"Keep away from me!" she commanded, peremptorily, and Mat obeyed.

"Wal, walk on ahead, Mat. Thet'll do, so long ez we git ter town. Which is the nearest way?"

"The way we came, I guess, 'squire," returned Mat.

"All right. Then lead on."

So, with Mat Clark walking in front to show the way, and 'Squire Caldwell holding Bess's arm in a professional clutch, the three started on their roundabout journey toward 'Squire Caldwell's house at the foot of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GUERILLO'S KNIFE MISSES FIRE.

THERE was no hope for the detective when he found himself the prisoner of Jim Townley and Guerillo.

It was war to the knife, and he knew it as soon as his senses came back.

Weak and insignificant as he looked some times, Robert Roberts was not easily damaged, even by such a blow as had been dealt him by the Mexican. Not that his skull was extraordinarily thick, but it had been well seamed by a life of adventure, in which hard knocks had been part of the every-day routine.

So it was only a few moments that he lay senseless, at the feet of Townley and the Mexican, and as soon as the two rascals recognized each other and had begun to evolve some plan, he was awake to all that was going on in his vicinity.

He was more quickly brought around by Jim Townley springing upon him, tearing open his coat and snatching the precious pocketbook from him.

"At last!" he muttered between his set teeth, "and I'll take care ter hold it this time."

The Mexican watched this act in evident trepidation.

Roberts was looking from Townley to Guerillo with a curious expression in his blue eyes, and now he drew his gold-rimmed glasses from his vest-pocket where they were secured with a slim gold chain, and calmly adjusted them on his nose.

Guerillo trembled, and the detective smiled.

"Guerillo, my friend. I'm afraid you've done rather a foolish thing," observed Roberts, with a smile.

"Caramba! What?"

"What?" repeated the detective. "That's a peculiar question, when my head is aching through that thump you gave me just now. Guerillo, I'm afraid you will be banged!"

The Mexican's yellow face turned livid, and his waxed mustache twitched as he looked into the innocent face of the well-dressed young man sitting on the ground, with his back propped against the wall.

"Bob ze Terror," he whispered, to himself.

"You think I'm a terror do you?" remarked the detective, pleasantly.

The Mexican's hair arose beneath his hat. He could have sworn he had not given audible expression to his thoughts, and yet here was the detective replying to them as if he had heard every word and comprehended them, too.

Jim Townley had no superstitious fears, however. He regarded Robert Roberts as a man who was dangerous to such men as himself, and as one who held a clew to a fortune that he was determined to win. But for his fear of the law, that even in that part of Arizona was not powerless, —he would have shot the detective down where he stood. As it was, he decided it would be better to adopt some other means of closing his mouth forever.

"You are goin' ter hang me, ain't yer?" he demanded of the detective, with a sneer that did not improve his hang-dog look.

"I will if I can, Mr. Townley," was the cool reply.

"Wal, you shall ef you ever hev ther chance. But now git up and come along."

Guerillo was watching every movement of the detective in trembling fear. What might not this terrible man do next?

Bob calmly reached his feet, picked up his Derby hat that had been knocked from his head in the struggle, and taking the little whisk from his pocket, brushed his hat and then the sleeves of his coat with the finishing care characteristic of him.

"Quit that an' come on," ordered Townley, who had been looking at these toilet operations with an expression of supreme disgust.

"Any'ing you say, Mr. Townley."

"I'll say somethin' more ef yer give me any back talk," growled Jim, threateningly.

"Caramba! Jeem! He is ze Terror!" whispered the Mexican.

"Terror! Wal, I'm er Terror too, when I git my fighting clothes on," replied Townley.

"Whoop! I kin eat grizzly b'ar an' ketch rifle bullets in my teeth when they're fired at ten yards! Terror? Wal, I should say I wuz! Hear me!"

"I do hear you, Mr. Townley, and I think you are making an ass of yourself," remarked the detective, calmly, as if he were merely stating an indisputable and obvious fact.

How long this discussion might have lasted it is impossible to say, if Guerillo had not brought it to a close by going on as fast as he could walk —or, rather, trot—in the direction of the cellar under Mat Clark's shanty.

"Get on thar," growled Townley, to the detective.

Bob, who had finished his brushing and tiddying by this time, walked on as coolly as if he had been strolling in Central Park, with Townley close behind him, keeping him well covered with his revolver.

It will be remembered that Townley had found his way into this subterranean place in a peculiar manner.

He had no desire to go back the same way, so he was content to follow Guerillo. He did not know how the Mexican had reached him, nor did he care particularly, so long as he could find his way out again.

Half an hour later the three men found themselves blundering along in the dark, and one of them, at least—the Mexican—knew that they were nearly at their destination.

The detective's brain had been working actively, in spite of his apparent carelessness as to what was passing around him.

Jim Townley kept his hand on Bob's shoulder when they reached the dark part of their journey, and occasionally the detective enjoyed the pleasant sensation of a cold pistol barrel on his temple, as the grasp of the desperado's hand on his shoulder became firmer and stronger.

Once or twice he was tempted to make a sudden twitch, release himself from the desperado's clutch, knock the pistol from his hand, and trust to his own strength and agility to overcome the enemy and make him a prisoner.

But there was Guerillo!

"He is a scared wretch, but if he were cornered he might give me trouble. Guess I'd better wait a little."

These reflections passed through the detective's mind, and perhaps it was fortunate that they led to this conclusion.

Bob believed in waiting for his opportunity except when circumstances warranted his making one for himself.

"Caramba! I lose ze way!" grumbled Guerillo, several paces in advance.

"You'd better find it, right quick, cuss yer!" was the gentle response of Townley, "or you'll hev trouble with me."

The detective did not say anything. He was waiting for developments.

There was a rattle and a snuffle and several muttered "Carambas" from Guerillo, indicating that he had found the door leading to Mat Clark's cellar, and was trying to get it open.

Neither Townley nor the detective knew what the Mexican had found, however. They expected there was some way out of this dark passage, but where the opening would be, or what sort of one, they had no idea. They were both blindly following the guidance of the Mexican.

"Caramba! I hev it," exclaimed Guerillo, at last, as he forced the door open and entered the cellar.

Townley cautiously forced his way along, holding Bob and keeping the cold muzzle of the pistol close to his temple the while.

Guerillo gained confidence when he reached the cellar, which increased when he saw that the trap-doors over his head were not quite closed, but allowed a thin streak of light to show through the center crack.

Guerillo placed the ladder, and with a dexterous use of his knife, forced the trap-door open.

One glance around the upper apartment showed him that it was empty, and he drew himself through the opening, and motioned for Townley and his prisoner to follow him.

Again the detective was tempted to end the difficulty between Townley and himself, once and forever, and again he restrained himself, so that he should have a better revenge by and by.

"Git up thar!" commanded Townley, gruffly.

"After you, Mr. Townley," was the detective's polite response.

"Git up thar, I tell yer!" repeated the desperado.

Again Jim Townley's life was hardly worth a moment's purchase, and again the detective's powerful self-control came into play to prevent his acting prematurely.

Slowly he ascended the ladder, and stood face to face with Guerillo, who, with his long knife in hand, stared vacantly at him, and seemed

ready to drop to the floor if the detective so much as winked at him.

The *tete-a-tete* between the Mexican and Robert did not last long, however. The detective hardly had time to be amused at Guerillo's ardent fear of him, when Jim Townley stood by his side, and had the revolver close to his temple.

"Mr. Townley it must be tiresome to you to hold that gun in that position. What do you expect to gain by it?"

"Never mind. You go and sit over in that corner, with yer face ter ther wall, an' don't move till I tell yer. I reckon I'm runnin' this yar arraagement, now, ain't I?"

Townley indicated a chair at one end of the room, at the furthest extremity from the table, and the detective, without a word of remonstrance, seated himself in the chair, with his back to the room.

"Good!" grunted the desperado. "Glad ter see yer hev some sense."

Their being no reply to this observation, Jim drew forth the detective's pocketbook, and taking out the map, in the three pieces, spread it upon the table, and tried to make it out.

The Mexican not being invited to take part in the examination of the map, walked uneasily about the room, the long knife still in his hand.

"Sit down, Guerillo," grunted Townley, once.

"Caramba!" was the only reply, and Guerillo continued his walking up and down the apartment.

Townley was not blessed with very active wits, and it took him some time to grasp the meaning of the diagram and memoranda contained in the three papers.

He ran his rough forefinger over the map, saw where the clew to the mine began, and how it led into the very heart of the mountain.

Then he read the notes and directions, and by their aid began to understand what it all meant.

"Um! Um! I see!" he muttered. "Yes, yes, Lucy gits it all, an' ef en'ything happens ter her before, why it goes to whoever chances ter find ther place."

He crumpled the paper in his hand and marched up and down the apartment in deep thought.

Gradually his thoughts took tangible form, although he did not utter them audibly.

"Jim Townley, you've got ter hev that thar property, an' thar's two ways fer yer ter git it. Either marry Lucy Laurent, or—take ther claim 'ithout her. You know whar it is, an' ther game is in yer own hands!"

There was murder in Townley's heart, and he sat down to the table to think out his plans.

In the mean time, the Mexican had been moving stealthily about the room, watching Jim Townley and the detective alternately, but not making any observations.

His flashing black eyes were turned constantly toward Robert, and it was easy to see that the most deadly hate and fear combined made the detective an object of particular interest to him.

As for the detective, he was so busy over his toilet that he did not appear to be considering anything else.

He had his shaving apparatus and other toilet necessaries disposed neatly about his person, and was always prepared to tittivate himself wherever he might happen to be. When he took his seat in the corner it was with considerable satisfaction that he had noted a bucket of water on the floor by the side of the chair. He had not scrupled to make use of this, and by the time Jim Townley had thoroughly examined the map and memoranda, the detective had shaved and washed and was now deeply engaged in twisting his hair into certain little curls that he considered becoming.

"Caramba! Eef I could," hissed the Mexican, as he strode up and down. "Eef I could!"

"What air you croaking about, Guerillo?" inquired Townley, gruffly, but without looking up from the map.

"Nothing, Jeem, nothing!" answered the Mexican submissively.

"Wal, keep yer durned mouth shut!"

There was silence for a few moments, during which Guerillo seemed to be trying to nerve himself to some desperate deed.

"Caramba! I weel!" he muttered.

Slowly, with so light a footfall that not a hint of his movements could be given to any one not actually looking at him, the Mexican crept toward the detective, who was calmly patting and twisting his light hair on his forehead.

The thoughts of Robert were evidently far away from any suspicion or fear of injury from the Mexican. His back was toward the room, and he was beyond all question not interested in anything except the lay of one little obstinate curl that would not lie on his forehead to suit him.

So far as the detective was concerned, the scene was one of pastoral peace.

But the Mexican was determined to disturb it, and there was a deadly purpose in every movement as he stepped lightly nearer and nearer to the corner, with that long, cruel knife uplifted in his right hand.

Jim Townley was still wrapt in thought and the detective was busy with his curl.

The Mexican was holding his breath and stepping on tip-toe toward his victim.

It was easy to see his purpose. Up went the knife over the detective's unconscious head and the white teeth of the Mexican ground together under the black mustache as the supreme moment drew near.

How quiet sat Robert the Terror as the hand of fate waved above him.

"Caramba!" The knife had whirled through the air and came down with crushing force.

But it did not kill Robert. Like a flash of lightning, the detective turned in his chair, caught the wrist of the Mexican, wrenched the knife from his hand and sent him, tumbling in a heap over Jim Townley so that the two lay in a squirming mass by the side of the table.

CHAPTER XXV

KNIFE TO KNIFE!

IT was only for a moment that Guerillo lay on the floor.

His fear of Robert was so great that now that he had openly defied him, he felt it impossible to do anything but fight to the death.

As he fell on Townley his hand accidentally rested on the hilt of a bowie-knife in that gentleman's belt and he drew it unhesitatingly.

"You durned Greaser! Git off'n me!" howled Townley, in a fury. "D'y'e think I'm er mule's bed? Get out!"

The Mexican, with the bowie in his hand, was glaring at the detective, and unheeded Townley's remonstrance.

"Caramba! I veel keel you, Boston Bob!"

The words came hissing through his hot, dry lips, and the detective, a good judge of human nature in all its moods, knew that the wretch before him had screwed up his courage to the point where he would rush on the end of his enemy's dagger in his wild thirst for vengeance.

Bob looked very slight and not at all like a warrior as he stood at one end of the room with the Mexican's knife in his hand, waiting for the onslaught of the enemy.

He knew that there was hot work cut out for him, but he could not forget that obstinate curl on his forehead, in the mean time, and he gave it several gentle little pats and persuasive twists, while standing watching warily every movement of his foe.

His gold-rimmed eye-glasses had been knocked from his nose as he turned to catch the Mexican's wrist, and he now adjusted them carefully, with the light gold chain that secured them hung over his right ear in the approved Boston style.

It may be explained that while he was arranging his hair as he sat in the chair in the corner, he was using a small mirror, about as large as the palm of his hand, and by that means had been able to keep a close watch upon the antics of Guerillo, while apparently thinking of nothing but his toilet.

"Caramba! Bob! I keel you!" cried Guerillo again, as he swayed from side to side, in his corner of the room, with his eyes fixed on the detective.

Bob did not answer, but Jim Townley who had been viewing the new turn of affairs philosophically, thinking that if either or both were killed it would only be to his advantage, guffawed and observed gruffly:

"Dunno but what er fair an' squar' fight 'u'd be ther best way ter settle this byar dispute 'between you two fellers. So, jist sail in, an' I'll be umpire."

"Caramba!"

"Yes, Guerillo, an' ef I see either uv yer doin' anything 'ez I think ain't exactly right, I'll jist draw my gun on ther one 'ez does it. Thet's ther kind uv grizzly I am!"

Townley made this announcement with a great deal of dignity, as he put the papers in his pocket and balancing his six-shooter in his right hand, so that his fore-finger rested easily upon the trigger, took his seat upon the table and prepared to sit in judgment.

Neither of the combatants spoke.

The Mexican was beside himself with rage, and the detective, cool as usual, still realized that he might need all his breath before his struggle with Guerillo came to an end.

The two men had been waiting, as if by mutual consent to see in which way they could best commence the attack. Only the quick breathing of the Mexican disturbed the stillness of the room, for the detective was perfectly quiet.

The Mexican's right foot was thrown forward, while he worked himself from side to side on his left, like a foot-racer waiting for the start.

Suddenly he darted forward like a tiger making a spring.

One bound took him across the room, and he and the detective were locked in a deadly embrace.

Jim Townley knocked his heels together and fairly hugged himself in his enjoyment of the scene.

Both combatants were masters of the art

of fighting with knives, and both were strong and sinewy.

The Mexican was the bigger and the heavier, but Robert Roberts had muscles of steel under his white skin, and he was as active as a cat.

The position each assumed when Guerillo had made his spring was that which all bowie-knife fighters must take if they are to have any chance at all.

Guerillo had rushed forward with the intention of driving his knife into the heart of his antagonist, if possible, but, at the same time, he kept a sharp lookout that the other knife was not used against him.

The detective was wholly on the defensive. Hence, when the Mexican reached him, he caught his knife hand by the wrist and held it rigid, at the same time that the Mexican did the same with his.

The men were now looking into each other's eyes. The same principle that applies to all personal contests, that of watching the eyes of the antagonist to see when he is about to strike.

Jim Townley was leaning forward, in his eagerness not to miss a movement of either.

For a moment the combatants were content to stand holding each other firmly enough to prevent either using his knife. Then their grasp tightened, and they pushed against each other with all their force.

It was a test of strength.

The Mexican, his piercing black eyes gleaming, and his breath coming in quick, convulsive gasps, braced himself like a rock as he tried to force the knife hand of the detective so far back that he would lose his balance and be at the mercy of his antagonist.

But the trick would not work.

The Professor had had too much experience to be caught in that way, and the Mexican found that he might as well have been pushing against the mountain itself for any effect he could see.

"Why don't yer fight?" howled Jim, when the two men had stood there for what seemed to him to be an unnecessarily long time.

The detective had been watching for his opportunity while braced up against the Mexican, and was only waiting a favorable moment to make a move.

It came at last!

He felt the Mexican's grasp relax in the slightest degree—so slight as to be hardly noticeable—and he took advantage of it.

He dropped to one knee, and exerting all his strength, raised the Mexican on his shoulder, and threw him clear over his head.

Lithe and active as a panther, Guerillo turned almost as he touched the floor, and had again assumed his former position with The Professor.

But the man did not remain quiet now. The Professor tried to force the Mexican down again, and Guerillo opposed the attempt with all his strength.

The two dropped to the floor and rolled over and over each other, never relaxing their hold on the hand that held the threatening knife, and struggling at the same time to use the weapon in their own hands.

"Bully!" yelled Jim Townley. "Yer hev more grit then I give yer credit fer, Guerillo! Stick to it! Stick to it!"

The combatants paid no attention to the enthusiastic outbursts of the onlooker. They had no time just then.

Suddenly the Mexican managed to jerk his knife hand out of the detective's grasp, and with a howl of triumph whirled it in the air and brought it down with all his force just as he had the detective lying on his back and completely at his mercy.

The Mexican aimed straight for the heart, and the blow very nearly carried out his intention.

By an almost superhuman effort, however, The Professor managed to shift his position two or three inches at the critical moment, and the Mexican's aim was disturbed.

The bowie-knife came down with terrific force, but instead of plunging into the detective's heart, caught the lapel of his light overcoat, and, going through it, pinned it to the floor.

The Professor understood in a second what had happened, and in the same instant made up his mind what to do.

Before the Mexican had time to more than mutter his one favorite oath, "Caramba!" the detective had slipped out of his overcoat, and sprung upon the Mexican.

Guerillo was still tugging at the handle of his bowie-knife, but the blow had been so fierce that the blade had sunk at least two inches into the pine flooring, and could not be stirred.

Bob could not resist the temptation to bestow a sounding cuff on Guerillo's ear with his open hand, and the Mexican leaped to his feet, fairly snarling with rage at the affront.

But the detective was ready for him.

As Guerillo reached his feet the detective threw his left arm around his antagonist's waist, clasping both arms as if in a vise. At the same time he placed the point of his knife at the Mexican's throat.

Guerillo could not move a hair's breadth.

"Caramba!"

"I beg your pardon."

"Why you not keel me?"

"Ah, why, indeed?" returned the detective, pleasantly. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Throw him off, Guerillo," cried Jim Townley. "What yer let him hold yer like that fer?"

"Caramba!"

The voice in which the Mexican uttered his oath now sounded as if it came from the bottom of a meal-bag, for The Professor was squeezing him so hard that it was impossible for him to speak freely.

That powerful left arm of the detective's might have been made of wrought iron instead of bone and flesh. The long, slim fingers held Guerillo's left arm close to his side, and his right was jammed in between the two men, so that he could not draw it forth, try as he might.

"Vell, v'y you not strike, eh?"

The Professor gave him a peculiar smile.

"Because it is not my play!" he answered.

Then he deliberately squeezed harder until the Mexican's ribs almost cracked beneath the awful pressure.

"Jeem!" cried Guerillo.

"Wal?"

"Caramba! Help!"

"Stay where you are!" commanded the detective, with sudden fierceness. "Make one step toward us, and I'll drive this knife through his throat."

"Caramba!"

"Wal, I dunno ez I car' very much what yer do ter that durned Greaser. He ain't no per-tick'lar friend uv mine."

As Townley uttered this gracious speech, Guerillo managed to turn his head slightly, so that he could look at his whilom partner.

"Oh, yer needn't scowl at me, Guerillo. I know my biz."

The desperado tossed his head as he thus spoke, and twisted his revolver in his hand in professional style, without losing his touch on the trigger.

It would be impossible to stay like this all day, however, and the detective was rapidly revolving in his mind what course he should pursue, when Townley took the matter out of his hands.

He began firing shots from his revolver close to the heads of the two men, but without hitting them.

"One, two, three, four, five!"

The noise and smoke, together with the fact of the bullets coming into unpleasant proximity with his head, confused the detective enough to make him drop his right hand that held the knife at Guerillo's throat.

That was the Mexican's salvation.

He leaped back by the side of Jim Townley, who at the same time covered the detective with his pistol, of which it will be remembered, one chamber held a cartridge.

"Quit that, now, Professor. I don't propose to let you kill the Greaser. I wuz only guyin' when I said that just now. So jist stand aside and let Guerillo get his knife."

"Certainly, Mr. Townley. I'll do anything you say," answered Robert, who had entirely recovered his equanimity, and was now gazing through his gold-rimmed glasses in the benignant manner peculiar to him when not actively engaged in any rough exercise that disturbed his usual calmness.

He drew forth the Mexican's knife from the floor with one powerful jerk, and coolly placed it in his pocket, after wrapping the blade in a handkerchief.

Then he picked up his coat and examined, with much solicitude, the hole made by the knife.

"Guerillo, when we come to a final settlement I shall charge you with one top-coat," observed Bob, as he brushed the garment with his little whisk-brush and put it on with great nicety. "It is all very well to stab your opponent if you can, but all the rules of politeness forbid your wantonly damaging his wardrobe."

The Mexican looked at this dainty little man as if he could not understand him—and probably he couldn't.

Jim Townley had refilled his revolver by this time, and was ready for the next move. Now that he held the precious paper he felt that there was only one thing to do after he had got rid of the detective—to find Lucy and insist upon bringing her to terms.

But what to do with The Professor? That was the problem, and so far he had found no solution of it. He could not kill him, and yet it seemed as if there could not be any safety as long as he lived.

But the solution came quicker than he expected.

Robert had been watching the two rascals and had made up his mind what to do.

He had been edging gradually nearer to where Townley still sat on the edge of the table, while the Mexican, as if thoroughly disgusted, had sunk into a chair by his side.

The half-open door was between the detective and the two partners, and it would not be possible to reach it without almost touching Townley's feet.

Yet the detective had made up his mind to get out of the shanty, and by means of the doorway, too.

"He has six shots there, and I suppose I should get at least one of them if I tried it," thought Robert, while he beamed through his glasses as benevolently as any professor from Boston ever could.

Suddenly he bent over the trap-door that led to the cellar, and which had been closed by Townley when he came up, and held up his finger in a listening attitude.

"What's ther matter that?" demanded Townley, his suspicions aroused in a moment.

The detective did not answer, but bending still lower, gave utterance to a low whistle as if signaling to some one under the floor.

"Durn your pictur! What yer doing?"

Townley rushed over to the trap-door, scowling fiercely at the detective the while.

"Who's thar?"

"No one!" shouted Robert, as with a quick movement he knocked the desperado's feet from under him and sent him sprawling into a corner.

Then with a bound he reached the doorway, and dashed through it, a bullet from Townley's six shooter almost grazing his ear as it buried itself in the door-post.

There was a yell from the Mexican which the detective answered with a whoop of defiance as he sped across the clearing and plunged into the dense wood on the other side.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STILL HUNT.

Robert's only object was to get away from Townley and the Mexican temporarily but he had no idea of letting them get out of his reach.

He was getting tired of their cussedness, as he told himself, and he felt that the time had arrived to bring things to a settlement as far as they were concerned.

"That fellow has the paper," he said to himself, "and although I know it by heart now, I am not inclined to let him keep a thing that he has no right to."

He was standing in the thick wood, watching the shanty, as he made this reflection, and every sense was on the alert for treachery on the part of his foes.

He saw the Mexican at the door looking at the wood, grinding his teeth in impotent rage, while Townley stood by his side revolver in hand as if hesitating what to do next.

It was getting late in the afternoon by this time and the long shadows were growing over hill-top and tree, and flooding everything with golden light.

The two desperadoes, in whose faces could be distinguished the working of evil passions within, were the only unpleasant objects in the whole view.

So thought the detective at least, as he examined his knife, and made sure that it was ready to his hand in the light, but strong belt, he wore beneath his fashionable clothes.

"Aha! They're coming. Just what I expected. Well, let them come."

The Mexican was standing irresolutely watching his companion, who was closing the shutters and door of the shanty, still with his revolver in his right hand, ready for any emergency. He knew Robert was somewhere in the vicinity, and he had had enough experience with that mild-mannered gentleman to be aware that he was dangerous, particularly when quiet.

"Come on, Guerillo! We hev ter find him now. Ef you'd kept quiet, thar wouldn't hev been any trouble, 'cause I'd jist hev kept him with us till I found er convenient time to crack his skull, an' everything would hev been lovely an' peaceable."

Jim Townley was perfectly serious in his manner as he said this, and evidently meant every word he said.

"Caramba! Eef I hed only keeled heem!"

The white teeth of the Mexican ground savagely beneath his black mustache, and his eyes turned up until a ring of white appeared around the iris that made him actually devilish.

"Ah, well, Guerillo! I never knew er Greaser ter do er thing at ther right time," returned Jim, philosophically. "But come on. We must run him down now ther best way we kin."

Townley struck boldly across the clearing and into the wood with the Mexican at his heels.

Townley did not fear much from the detective now. He felt instinctively that there was no danger of Robert attacking them from ambush, but rather that he would hasten to the town to get the assistance of Squire Caldwell and a posse to draw himself and the Mexican into the meshes of the law.

Nevertheless he kept his eyes open, as he reached the wood, and looked on every side for signs of the detective's presence, while the detective, with head slightly bent, seemed as if he would pierce the very trunks of the trees with his dark eyes.

"Guess he's gone on, Guerillo," observed Townley, as he stood just within the wood and listened intently for a minute.

His back was against an immense cedar, while the Mexican stood immediately in front of him, and kept his eyes roving restlessly in all directions.

The mesquite bush rose in tufts here and there,

but there was no indication of its having been disturbed by human feet lately.

"Caramba! He not here," snarled the Mexican, but he kept a watchful eye on every side nevertheless, as if he feared the terrible Bob might appear at a moment's notice and deal vengeance upon him without warning.

"Come on, Guerillo!"

Townley marched on determinedly in the direction of Hopeful Gulch, and the Mexican followed him submissively and somewhat fearfully.

No sooner were they out of sight than a smiling face, with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on its nose, appeared at an opening in the great trunk of the cedar above the lower branches, while the detective's voice observed, softly:

"So much for Jim Townley's smartness. Here I have been sitting coolly and comfortably in this little nest just over his head, and he had no idea that I was within half a mile."

Bob indulged in a quiet, but hearty laugh, from which he appeared to derive the most intense enjoyment. It was a principle of his life that it was possible to transact serious business and get plenty of fun out of existence at the same time.

"It's rather hard on clothes," he continued, as he drew himself out of the hollow, and swinging by a branch, let himself lightly down to the ground, "but I'll get a new suit as soon as I reach Chicago."

His first care was to brush his clothing and array his toilet as well as possible with the means at hand, and really it was wonderful that he could keep himself so neat and clean in spite of his various rough experiences in this out-of-the-way spot.

"Those fellows can't be very far ahead of me, and I do not want to walk right over them accidentally. But I mean to keep them in sight."

He walked swiftly for a hundred yards or so, and then stepped behind a tree.

Townley and Guerillo were marching along side by side, with the American a little in advance.

They evidently had no idea that the detective was behind them, nor that he was in the immediate vicinity before them. In fact, Townley had made up his mind that Bob had gone right down to the town, and that it was there they must look for him, and play the bold game he contemplated.

"Well, well, Townley, go on. We shall be all right before this time to-morrow, if I know anything," said the detective to himself, with a chuckle, as he tried to coax that little, straw-colored mustache of his into a curl, and took off his derby hat to pat his favorite bang out into an engaging twist.

It was easy for the detective to keep his men in sight, for they never looked behind them.

Down the mountain they went until they arrived at the spot whence it was necessary to turn off to reach the cave in which they had stored the stolen weapons from Silas Laurent's house.

"Guerillo," said Jim.

"Vell?"

"Guess we'd better go an' look at ther crib."

"Caramba! But—"

"Oh, yes, I know," interrupted Townley, impatiently. "We left all them people down thar, didn't we? An' I s'pose you think they might git ther drop on us an' fix us thet way?"

"Caramba! Isn't that so?"

"Guerillo."

"Vell!"

"You're er durned fool!"

The Mexican's eyes flashed, and his hand flew instinctively to the place where he would have found the bilt of his knife if his weapon had not been in the possession of the detective.

"Caramba!" he muttered.

"Yes, caramba, if yer like, but yer do talk like er durned fool sometimes, yer know, Guerillo," said Townley, in a gently argumentative tone.

The Mexican did not answer.

"Guerillo, don't you know ez Robert and ther gals, an' ther rest wuz er walkin' around that thar mine ez we mean ter have?"

"Caramba! yeess!"

"Wal, ef they wuz then they must hev found some way ov gittin' out ov ther crib, mustn't they, eh?"

The Mexican nodded.

"Wal, now, Guerillo, ain't yer er durned fool ter talk like yer did jist now?"

The Mexican did not appear to be convinced, but he nodded his head as if he partly conceded his companion's position at least.

Without wasting any more time in speech, Townley turned off and went toward the canyon where lay the log that hid the entrance to the cave.

"Howar' we goin' ter git down thar, I dunno," mused Townley, half aloud. "In tryin' ter shut off them other savages, we've beaten ourselves."

He was determined to find his way in somehow, nevertheless, and he walked on with a confident air that encouraged even the half-hearted Guerillo.

He reached the log that formerly hid the platform leading to the doorway of the cave, and looking over, saw that the door, framed of a log

and roots, described in an earlier chapter, was closed.

"Very kind in 'em. They've shut up the house afore goin' away," he said with a grin.

"How we get in?" asked Guerillo.

"I'll show yer, Guerillo, ef yer hev any pluck."

"How?"

"Look hyer, Guerillo, do yer want ter git some ov this boodle we're playin' for?"

"Yees."

"Wal, then you'll hev ter help me git it. Ther fu'st thing is ter git inter this hyer cave an' see what shape things is in."

"Vell?"

"Come down hyar on the log."

The Mexican had been standing on the bank above wondering what his companion would do next. He came down now, in obedience to Townley's command.

"Guerillo, you'll hev ter swing over thar."

"Caramba!"

"Look hyar! Here's ther way."

Townley lay at full length on the log, and braced himself in such a manner that he could lean over with his arms hanging over the edge. He had caught his feet in a space between the bank and the log so that it would be impossible for him to fall or be dragged over unless his legs were pulled out of their sockets.

"Now, Guerillo!"

"Caramba!"

The Mexican uttered his favorite oath with a genuine expression of terror. He saw what was in the mind of the bolder villain.

"Come hyar, I tell yer."

The fierce tone in which Townley spoke startled the Mexican, and he went toward him, hesitatingly, but surely.

"Git over."

"Caramba! What you mean?"

"Take my two hands."

"Caramba!"

"Take my two hands, I tell yer."

Townley seized the hands of the Mexican in a peculiar grip, so that the more they were pulled the tighter would the clasp become.

"Caramba!"

"Yes, I suppose so," responded Townley, with a sneer, as with a quick movement he threw Guerillo over the edge of the log, and held him, swinging in space.

"Caramba!" cried the Mexican, in horror, as he felt himself utterly helpless.

Jim Townley took no notice of this exclamation, however. He saw that the Mexican could reach the doorway of the cave, and that was all he cared about.

"Can yer pull the door open?" he asked.

"Caramba! Without my hands? How?" was the breathless response.

"What's yer feet fer?" growled Townley.

The Mexican took the hint at once. As he was swung backward and forward he managed to throw his feet and legs around the bent with that controlled the peculiar door of the cave, and, with a sharp tug, assisted by Townley, he pulled it open, and the cave was revealed.

"Now, Guerillo, when I swing yer to ther cave ther third time, let go my hand. See?"

"Caramba! Yees."

"Wal! Look out then. One! Two! Three!"

As the miner thus spoke he swung the Mexican with increased force, and as he said "three!" he shot Guerillo into the cave in a heap down the steps that led into the interior.

"Caramba!" ejaculated the Mexican, ruefully, as he rubbed his shins.

"Hurt, Guerillo?"

"Caramba! Not mooth."

"Wal, then, all right. Look around thar, and git some rope. I know thar's some in thar."

"Yees."

"Light ther lamp on ther wall so's you kin see, and make sure thar's no one in thar."

"Caramba!"

This time the oath was uttered with some trepidation, indicating that Guerillo had not thought before of the possibility of the cave not being empty.

He managed to light the lamp, and then a quick glance told him that he was alone in the crib.

A coil of rope in the corner—the same rope with which Lucy Laurent and her friends had made their way into the cave—caught his eye, and he brought it to the doorway at once.

"Thet's right, Guerillo," remarked Jim Townley, approvingly.

The Mexican threw one end of the line to his companion, who caught it and fastened it to the log.

"Hold it tight, Guerillo."

"Caramba! I veel."

Townley was a heavy, clumsy-looking fellow, but he was more active than he appeared, for he had slid down the rope, and was by the side of the Mexican in an instant.

His first proceeding was to close the door, allowing the cord to hang from the log where it would be easy to catch it and use it for getting up to the bank when necessary. Then he examined carefully, to try and discover whether there was any other means of egress besides that he had made.

"Guerillo, they must hev got out through ther

door, and then struck ther entrance to ther mine somewhar on ther mountains, but, blame me ef I kin make it out."

Townley scratched his head in perplexity, for the explanation he gave did not satisfy himself, any more than it did Guerillo.

"Hows'er, thet don't matter so very much," he continued. "Guerillo, I think we'd better see 'bout puttin' these hyar weapons in er safe place. Thar's jewels enough on them old-fashioned guns an' things ter give us both er fortune, even ef we missed the gold mine."

"An' Lucy Laurent," added the Mexican, with a sly smile.

"Yer yellow-faced Greaser, what hev yer ter do with thet thar gal?"

"Caramba! Nothing! I not care," answered the Mexican, quickly, for he did not care to offend his companion just now.

"Wal, then, s'pose you stay hyar, and get them weapons into some sort of decent shape, so ez we kin carry them away, while I go down ther mountain ter see what I kin learn 'bout thar gal."

"Lucy?"

"Yes. I want her more'n I do ther gold mine, Guerillo, an' I'm goin' ter hev her ef I kin git her."

A smile of derision curled the Mexican's black mustache, but he took care not to let Jim Townley see it.

"Pick me out er good Winchester from ther pile over thar!" commanded Townley.

There were plenty of modern as well as old-fashioned weapons in the heap, and Townley soon held in his hand a splendid repeating rifle of the latest pattern, with a cartridge-belt well supplied with ammunition that had been conveniently fastened to the gun.

"Good-by, Guerillo. I won't be long."

Before the Mexican realized what Townley was doing he had opened the door, and seizing the hanging rope, had climbed hand over hand to the log over his head, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ROBERT USES A WINCHESTER.

LET US SHIFT THE SCENE TO 'SQUIRE CALDWELL'S HOUSE ON THE MAIN STREET OF HOPEFUL GULCH.

IT IS THE MORNING AFTER THE EVENTS NARRATED IN THE LAST CHAPTER, AND 'SQUIRE CALDWELL IS CONDUCTING AN EXAMINATION OF THE CASE OF BESS MORROW AND MAT CLARK.

"SEEMS TER ME, MAT, EZ YOU AIR EZ BAD EZ BESS EF I UNDERSTAND THER CASE," SAID THE 'SQUIRE, AS HE LEANED BACK IN THE BIG CHAIR IN HIS DINING-ROOM THAT HE USED FOR AN OFFICE, AND LOOKED AT THE TWO DEFENDENTS.

"WHAT FER, 'SQUIRE? WHAT HAVE I DONE?" WHINED CLARK.

"DON'T YER SAY THET TER ME AG'IN OR I'LL COMMIT YOU TER THER CELLAR WHAR YOU'VE SPENT THER NIGHT, AN' I WON'T GIVE YER NO HEARING AT ALL," RETURNED THE 'SQUIRE, WITH AWFUL DIGNITY.

"SQUIRE, HE KILLED MY POOR FATHER, AN' I KNOW IT. I SAW HIM JIST AS HE DID IT," PUT IN BESS, AS SHE DARTED A VENGEFUL GLANCE AT MAT.

"NEVER YOU MIND THET, NOW, BESS," ANSWERED THE 'SQUIRE. "THE STATOOTS COVERS YOUR CASE, AN' WE'LL BRING 'EM FORWARD AFTER ER WHILE. I JIST WANTED TER SEE HOW YOU GOT OUT UV JAIL, AN' WHO HELPED YER."

"NO ONE HELPED ME."

"DON'T BE SO FRESH, BESS, AN' DON'T LOOK CONTEMPTUOUS AT THER COURT OR YOU'LL FIND YERSELF IN TROUBLE."

MAT CHUCKLED.

"YES, AN' YOU TOO, MAT. IT APPLIES TER YOU EZ WELL," ADDED THE 'SQUIRE.

"'SQUIRE," INTERRUPTED BESS.

"WAL?"

"WHO'S ER RUNNIN' THER STORE BELONGIN' TER MY FATHER?"

"NO ONE."

"NARY ER ONE?"

"NO."

"YOU MEAN IT'S SHET UP?"

"YES."

"WAL, 'SQUIRE. THAT'S AG'IN' THER LAW. I KNOW THET MUCH. YOU HEV NO RIGHT TO STOP 'ER BUSINESS."

"I'LL HEV TER LOOK THET UP IN THER STATOOTS," SAID THE 'SQUIRE, DUBIOUSLY.

"YER NEEDN'T, YER WON'T FIND IT IN THER STATOOTS. BUT WHAT I SEZ IS THIS HYAR: I'M THER OWNER UV THET PLACE NOW MY FATHER IS DE'D, AN' I OUGHT TER BE THAR TER LOOK AFTER THINGS," DECLARED BESS, DETERMINEDLY.

"BUT, BESS, YER SEE, YOU AIR HELD FER MURDER," HESITATED THE 'SQUIRE.

"THET'S WHAT," MUTTERED MAT CLARK.

"YOU KEEP YER MOUTH SHET, MAT," COMMANDED THE 'SQUIRE WRATHFULLY.

BESS GAVE MAT A FIERCE LOOK AS SHE REPLIED TO 'SQUIRE CALDWELL'S OBJECTION: "SEE HYAR, 'SQUIRE, YOU ALLERS KNOW WHAR TER FIND ME EF I'M AT HOME, DON'T YER?"

"WAL, YES, BESS—"

"GOOD!" INTERRUPTED THE YOUNG WOMAN. "THEN LET ME GO DOWN TER THER SALOON AN' RUN IT. I KIN DO IT JIST EZ WELL EZ MY FATHER, AN' WHENEVER YOU WANT ME TER GO TER COURT, WHY, I'LL BE THAR."

"WAL, SART'INLY, THAR'S BEEN A BIG SIGHT UV GRUMBLIN' SINCE THER PLACE HEZ BEEN SHET UP. THER BOYS HEZN'T NOWHAR TO GO NIGHTS NOW."

BESS SAW THE ADVANTAGE SHE HAD GAINED, AND WALKED TOWARD THE DOOR.

"GOOD-BY, 'SQUIRE! I'M GOIN' DOWN THAR."

"YOU AIR? GOT THER KEY?"

"THET'S SO. NO, I AIN'T. I FERGOT. HAND IT OVER."

'SQUIRE CALDWELL WAS COMPLETELY OVERCOME BY THE HEADLONG MANNER OF BESS, AND IN ANOTHER MINUTE SHE HAD THE KEY AND WAS ON HER WAY DOWN TO THE SALOON-GROCERY THAT HAD BEEN FOR SO LONG OPERATED BY HER FATHER.

"NOW, MAT, WHAT ERABOUT THET TENDERFOOT FROM CHICAGO EZ YOU WUZ TELLIN' ME 'BOUT—THAT CROOK THERS THEY CALL ROBERT THE TERROR?"

THE 'SQUIRE'S QUESTION WAS ANSWERED RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY BY THE DOOR BEING PUSHED OPEN TO ADMIT NO LESS A PERSON THAN ROBERT ROBERTS HIMSELF.

MAT CLARK SHRUNK UNTIL HE SEEMED TO BE ABOUT HALF HIS NATURAL SIZE.

"HELLO, YOUNG FELLER, WHAR DID YOU COME FROM?" STAMMERED THE 'SQUIRE.

THE DETECTIVE STEPPED OVER TO HIM AND WHISPERED SOMETHING IN HIS EAR.

"WHAT'S THAT? DO YER MEAN TER SAY YOU AIR—"

"YES, SIR. LOOK HERE."

THE DETECTIVE THREW OPEN HIS FASHIONABLY CUT VEST, AND INSIDE THE COLLAR REVEALED A SMALL SILVER PLATE ON WHICH CERTAIN LETTERS WERE ENGRAVED.

"BUT YOU MIGHT HEV STOLEN THET BADGE," SAID THE 'SQUIRE WITH A CUNNING SMILE.

"NOT VERY EASILY."

"NO; NOT EASILY. BUT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DONE."

THE DETECTIVE SMILED AS HE HELD OUT HIS HAND AND TOOK THE GREAT RIGHT PAW OF 'SQUIRE CALDWELL AND GAVE IT A PECCULAR CLUTCH AND TWIST.

"THE 'SQUIRE'S FACE BEAMED IN A BROAD SMILE THAT COMPLETELY CHANGED ITS EXPRESSION.

"WELL, 'SQUIRE, I COULDN'T HAVE STOLEN THET GRIP, COULD I, DO YOU THINK?" ASKED THE DETECTIVE.

"NO, YOU'RE SQUAR'," RETURNED THE 'SQUIRE, HEARTILY. "NOW, WHAT KIN I DO FER YER?"

"TAKE CARE OF THIS FELLOW FOR ME, IN THE FIRST PLACE."

AS THE PROFESSOR SPOKE HE SUDDENLY SEIZED MAT CLARK AND PINIONED HIS ARMS TO HIS SIDE WITH HIS POWERFUL WHITE HANDS, AND LOOKED STRAIGHT INTO HIS EYES.

MAT CLARK STRUGGLED, BUT HE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE TRIED TO SHAKE OFF THE CLASP OF A GRIZZLY BEAR. BOB ONLY SMILED AT HIS IMPOTENT ATTEMPTS TO GET AWAY.

IN THE MEAN TIME 'SQUIRE CALDWELL HAD BUSTLED ABOUT, AND HAD TAKEN FROM A DRAWER OF AN OFFICIAL-LOOKING DESK IN A CORNER, A PAIR OF BRIGHT, STEEL HANDCUFFS. THESE HE SLIPPED UPON MAT CLARK'S WRISTS, WITH CONSIDERABLE PRIDE IN HIS OWN DEXTERITY.

"THAR YER AIR, MR. ROBERTS. I DON'T THINK ANY UV THER BOYS IN CHICAGO COULD HEV DONE THET BETTER. AIN'T THEY BEAUTIES? I AIN'T NEVER HAD NO CHANCE TER USE THEM AFORE."

THE DETECTIVE RELEASED CLARK'S ARMS WHEN THE HANDCUFFS WERE PUT ON, BUT HE STILL KEPT HIS HAND ON THE PRISONER'S SHOULDER.

"I'M MUCH OBLIGED TO YOU, 'SQUIRE. THOSE HANDCUFFS ARE VERY GOOD. HAVE YOU ANY PLACE TO PUT THE PRISONER FOR SAFETY?"

THE 'SQUIRE ANSWERED BY OPENING A DOOR THAT LED INTO A VERY DARK AND EARTHY-SMELLING CELLAR, AND MOTIONING CLARK TO GO DOWN.

"ONE MINUTE, 'SQUIRE. THERE IS A LITTLE FORMALITY THAT WE MAY AS WELL GO THROUGH."

THE "FORMALITY" WAS THE SEARCHING OF THE PRISONER, WHICH OPERATION WAS PERFORMED BY THE PROFESSOR WITH A CELESTY AND DEXTERITY COMMON ENOUGH TO VETERAN POLICE OFFICERS, BUT WHICH SEEMED RATHER INCONGRUOUS IN CONNECTION WITH THE CAREFUL TOILET AND GENERALLY LAZY AIR OF ROBERT ROBERTS.

"GIT DOWN THAR, MAT."

"WHAT'S THER CHARGE?" DEMANDED CLARK, SULKILY.

"MURDER!" WAS THE DETECTIVE'S LACONIC REPLY.

"Hello, Arthur, my boy!" he exclaimed, suddenly, as Arthur Greer appeared in the doorway and looked anxiously around.

"Why, Professor, you here?"

"Seems like it, eh?"

"Where have you been?"

"Too long a story, Arthur. Where have you been?"

"Have you seen those rascals, Townley and Guerillo?"

"I know where they are."

"Where are they?"

"I am going after them when I have finished this cigar. Don't worry me now."

"He's er cool 'un," muttered 'Squire Caldwell to himself. "No wonder they think er great deal of him in Chicago."

Arthur Grier knew the detective well enough by this time to be sure that it was of no use trying to hurry him against his will. So he dropped into a chair and waited.

"Had your breakfast, Arthur?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

Arthur Grier blushed slightly, and Robert winked at him knowingly.

"Ah, yes, I see. You happened to drop into Silas Laurent's place as you came down."

"Yes."

"I thought so. That's a good weapon you have there. Did Silas lend you that, too?"

Dude Grier unslung a well-made Winchester from his shoulder and looked at it admiringly as he handed it to the detective.

"Yes, it's a beauty."

"You fellers in Chicago don't use them very much, though, do you?" suggested the 'squire, as he looked at the rifle with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Not very much. We have to be handy with the revolver sometimes, however," returned the detective.

"Yes, but that's different from a revolver. Let me see that gun."

Robert handed the Winchester to the 'squire, who stepped outside into the open road and aimed at a pine tree a hundred yards off.

"Do yer see that white spot on the trunk that's been blazed off, 'bout ez big ez er twenty-dollar gold piece?" asked the 'squire.

"Yes."

"Watch it."

Crack went the rifle, and the bullet hit the very center.

"Pretty good shooting. Can you hit things thrown in the air?" asked the detective.

"Kin I?" repeated the 'squire, contemptuously. "Throw up two things at once. Tbar's er lot of pop-bottles on the veranda. Throw up two of them, Dude."

Dude Grier seized two of the bottles and threw them up in different directions.

The 'squire banged away, and by a quicker movement than most men would be capable of, shattered both bottles, before they reached the ground.

"Phew! That's hot work, Dude. Now, Mr. Roberts, would yer like ter try yer hand?"

"I don't mind."

"Wal, I'll throw up one pop-bottle just ter give yer er chance ter see what yer kin do."

Up went the bottle, and Robert, apparently not taking aim at all, smashed it to pieces.

"Good! You shoot well with er rifle, arter all," cried the 'squire, in surprise, as well as admiration.

"Sometimes. Throw up two bottles, 'squire."

"Two?"

"Yes, and throw them up over here, where the earth is soft that they will not break when they reach the ground. There is a little trick I used to do that I would like to try now."

"What is it?"

"Well, I will shoot through the opening of the bottle and make the bullet come out through the bottom without damaging it in any other way."

The 'squire opened his mouth in astonishment.

"I don't believe no man kin do it," he declared, doggedly.

He threw up the two bottles, not quite so far apart as they had been thrown for himself, but making them turn in the air.

The detective held the rifle easily, and as the bottles went up, shot twice, in the same careless way that he did everything, and then dropped the butt of the weapon on the ground while the 'squire picked up the bottles.

There was a small hole in the bottom of each bottle, showing that the detective's aim had been perfectly true.

"Bob, you're a shooter," said Dude, with a gratified smile.

The 'squire did not say anything, but he grasped Robert Roberts's hand with a fervor that was more expressive than words.

There was a wood to the left of where the three men were standing, and the detective's eyes happened to be turned in that direction.

He had been carelessly filling the magazines of the rifle from Dude Grier's cartridge-belt while the 'squire was picking up the bottles, and now brought the weapon half way to his shoulder as if to try its weight.

"I should like to show you how a Winchester

can stir up a sensation where you would think there was no chance of making one," he remarked, with a peculiar smile.

"How?"

"Look!"

Like a flash he brought the rifle to his shoulder and fired four shots into the wood to his left in rapid succession.

There was a howl of rage and another of pain, and then a shot from a rifle whizzed past the 'squire's head and buried itself in the house behind him.

"Look out! Take cover!" cried the detective, as he stepped behind one of the wooden posts of the veranda, and sent two more shots into the wood.

Then two men, whom Dude and the squire recognized at once as Jim Townley and Guerillo, broke from the clump of trees, and gaining the road up to the mountain, dashed along it as if Old Nick were at their heels.

The detective burst into a hearty laugh, and fired another shot in the air.

"Caramba!" yelled the Mexican, getting out of range behind some trees at a turn of the road as he clapped his hand to his shoulder, where a stinging pain told him that one of Bob's shots had taken effect.

"Hit, Guerillo?" asked Townley, breathlessly, as he, too, got out of range.

"Caramba! Yees. Boston Bob! He the devil!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DRAWING THE DEATH NET.

"DUDE, we must get those fellows," said the detective, quietly, as he filled up the Winchester.

"All right! I'm with you."

"So am I," added the 'squire.

"Good! What weapons have you?"

"All you want. I'm always well heeled."

"Bring them out, then."

The detective handed Dude Grier's rifle back to him, as the 'squire brought forth two others, of which he kept one and bestowed the other upon Bob.

Each of the three was provided with a revolver, and then they made their way up the hill after the two desperadoes.

The detective had a pretty good idea where the hunt would lead them, and the three men, at his suggestion, went straight toward the house of Silas Laurent.

As they approached the place, they moved with extreme caution. There were plenty of places in which it would be possible for Townley and the Mexican to lurk in ambush, and although the detective depended upon the dread of consequences entertained by both the desperadoes for the safety of his own party, he was by no means sure that they would not pluck up courage and open fire if brought to bay.

All question of quarter between the two parties was at an end now. It was fight to the death.

At last they got within sight of Silas Laurent's house.

Not a sign of life was to be seen save a column of smoke from the chimney, indicating that Lucy was not neglecting her culinary duties at home, whatever dangers and difficulties might surround her.

"Strange we don't see nothin' uv them fellers," grunted the 'squire, who began to feel the effect of so much climbing in a shortness of breath, that troubled him sometimes when he undertook violent exertion.

"They are here, 'squire, nevertheless. We shall find them directly," returned the detective.

The doors at the front of the house were open, showing that the inmates were enjoying all the light and air that were available on this bright morning.

For a few minutes the three men stood watching the house, their rifles ready for instant use.

"Those fellows have not gone beyond this house, because if they had, we should be able to see them."

The Professor pointed to the winding path that led up the mountain beyond the shanty, as he spoke. It was quite clear, and in the searching morning light, it would have been impossible for any one to have hidden himself there unless he had had so much greater start than had been secured by Townley and Guerillo.

"No. We have trailed them to this spot, and it is evident that they can only be in one place," observed the detective, calmly, as he adjusted his high collar and stroked his small mustache.

"And that place—"

The detective waved his hand toward the house.

"What? You think they're in the house, do yer?" cried the 'squire, with a frown. "Wal, I'll soon bring ther statoots ter bear on them. I'll—"

"I think," interrupted The Professor, "we would do more good by bringing our Winchesters to bear on them."

"The Professor's right," put in Dude Grier, with a smile. "We can bring on the statutes afterward."

The three had been cautiously drawing nearer to the house during the last three sentences, and now saw that the door at the back, which it will

be remembered, opened on a space between the house and the wall of not more than four feet, was partly open.

Cautiously they approached the door, for they knew not what might be the intention of Townley, and it would not have surprised them particularly to receive a shot at any moment.

"Arthur?" said the detective.

"Well?"

"I think it might be better for one of us to go forward and reconnoiter while the other two keep back in the woods, out of sight."

"I'll go ahead," announced the 'squire. "Ez the representative uv ther law an' ther statoots, I ought ter go on an' bring these fellers ter time."

"I'm afraid they have not very much respect for the law and the statutes," returned the detective. "My opinion is that it would be better—"

"For me to go," interrupted Dude.

"Arthur, I believe you are right," said the detective, with a touch of admiration in his tone. "Go in there, and if there is any trouble, we shall be here to help you."

"Thanks, Professor," was all Dude Grier said as he shook the detective's hand warmly.

"Watch yourself, Arthur, and when you want us to come, blow this."

The detective produced a small whistle and placed it in Dude's hand, who dropped it into a small pocket in his shirt, where it would be ready at a moment's notice.

He stepped briskly toward the house, while the detective and 'squire withdrew to the shelter of the clump of trees, and saw him walk boldly into the back doorway.

They watched and listened intently for ten minutes, but neither saw nor heard anything to warn them of what was going on inside.

"Squire?"

"Wal?"

"Let's go and see."

"That's just what I've been wantin' ter do all ther time."

"Rifle ready?"

"You bet!"

The 'squire held his Winchester ready for immediate action, his finger touching the trigger, while the detective, keeping his Winchester slung at his back, prepared to place his trust in his revolver.

Precautions seemed to be unnecessary, however, for nothing prevented their reaching the back door and stepping into the kitchen.

The door between the kitchen and the front of the house was closed, and no one was to be seen.

The detective tried to open the door, but it was fastened on the other side.

"There is something wrong here, 'squire," whispered the detective.

"Sure?"

"Give me your shoulder."

'Squire Caldwell understood this request, and applying his shoulder to the door, simultaneously with that of Robert, they both pushed with all their force, and burst it open.

The result was rather unexpected.

They had shoved with all their strength, but had hardly calculated upon its giving way so easily. So, when it opened, both were shot headlong into the other room.

"Caramba!"

The Mexican and Arthur Grier were lying on the floor holding each other in a deadly embrace, and when the two visitors made their appearance, they dropped full upon the Mexican.

The "Caramba!" of Guerillo was in the shape of an involuntary grunt of pain, for they had knocked the wind out of him.

Dude Grier lost no time in taking advantage of the diversion in his favor, and was on his feet as soon as the Mexican was pushed away from him.

"Hold that rascal," yelled Dude, and then he sprung to the front yard, which, it will be remembered was divided from the outer world generally by the two doors being secured by bolts.

The detective saw that one of the bolts was unfastened now, and that the door on the opposite side from the path by which they had approached the house was open, so that one could reach the path leading up the mountain on that side.

"What's the trouble, I wonder?" said the 'squire, bewildered by the rapidity of Dude Grier's movements.

"Trust Arthur. He will attend to it, I have no doubt. In the mean time, we had better secure this squirming, yellow brute."

The detective spoke with his accustomed sang froid, but he was holding Guerillo in an iron grip notwithstanding.

The Mexican looked at the detective with a hunted expression that was almost pitiable. He knew now that he had nothing more to hope, and although he would have killed his captor with the greatest of pleasure if he could, he dared not raise his hand even if he had been free.

"Caramba! V'at you do wiz me?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"I am going to take you to Chicago, Guerillo, as soon as I get a little business settled that I have here," answered Bob, quietly.

"Zey vill hang me."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Caramba!"

"Exactly. You may swear in your outlandish way all you please, Guerillo. But you should have thought of consequences before. I have given you chances, but you would not take them."

"Caramba!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three shots resounded and echoed in the mountains outside, and both the 'squire and Guerillo started.

The detective alone did not seem to be disturbed, although a slight quiver in the eyelids behind the gold-rimmed glasses would have revealed to a close observer that he was more concerned than he appeared to be.

"Guerillo!" he said, suddenly, as he placed the muzzle of his six-shooter to the Mexican's temple.

"Caramba! V'at?"

"You try anything like that and I'll blow your brains out. You know me!"

The detective's tones were polite, and even gentle, but the Mexican knew that he meant what he said.

"Caramba! I was not goin' to do nozzing."

"Well, don't try to jump out of my hands again."

The 'squire had espied some stout cord in a corner of the room behind the piano, and he now produced it, and, in obedience to a sign from the detective, fastened the hands of the Mexican behind him, and then, having tied his legs, threw him on the floor and secured him to the leg of the piano in such a manner that he was absolutely helpless.

"How's that, Professor?" asked the 'squire, with a touch of pride.

"Very good. Stay here and watch him while I go out and see what's the trouble."

Bob had hardly reached the ledge above the cabin that led up into the mountains before he saw that Dude Grier had found some lively work cut out for him.

The path that led above the cabin was only a narrow ledge, partly natural, and partly hewn out by miners who had required a path, and had cut away the rocks and earth in places where they made obstructions. It was generally very narrow, although widening to several yards here and there. Any one falling from it would not necessarily fall to the very bottom of the canyon, but would probably roll and bump down by degrees, with the chance of avoiding a fatal fall altogether.

As Bob gained the first ledge, he looked up and saw the meaning of the shots he had heard.

Dude Grier and Jim Townley were locked in a deadly embrace, while old Silas Laurent lay apparently dead at their feet. Leaning over her father, but with a revolver in her hand and fierce purpose in her face, was Lucy Laurent.

There was blood on Townley's face, from a wound in his forehead, and the detective's quick eye saw that Dude Grier's left arm was hanging helpless at his side.

"Let go, me, d'ye hear?" growled Townley, as he tried to shake off the grasp of Dude's right hand.

He struggled desperately, but the young man clung to him with almost superhuman strength.

Although Dude had but one arm at liberty, he was making powerful use of it. He had it around the desperado, and was holding him so that he could not get his hand to his revolver.

Two Winchesters—one belonging to Townley and the other to Grier—lay at their feet, but they were out of reach, and neither could stoop to get them without placing himself in the power of the other.

"Cuss yer!" howled Townley. "Let go my arm."

Dude Grier's only reply was to hold him tighter.

The detective was seeking some way to get to the scene of the combat without going around the path.

So far he had not been seen by either friend or foe, all being too much occupied to notice anything away from their immediate vicinity.

If he could manage to climb up the face of the cliff he could be with them in a few minutes. If he went around he might be too late to render assistance.

Townley was tugging away, and Dude felt his right arm getting weaker. Townley noticed it, too.

He made one tremendous effort and managed to release his right arm enough to reach the butt of his revolver in his belt.

To draw it and point it straight at the head of the unconscious Lucy Laurent was the work of an instant. The girl's face was turned away, and although she held a six-shooter in her hand, she had no thought of using it. She believed her father to be dying, and she had no eyes for anything but him.

"Will yer let go uv me?" hissed Townley in Dude's ear.

Dude did not answer.

"Will yer let go, I say?"

"No!"

"Look hyar! I'll give yer one more chance."

"I don't want it."

"Don't yer? Wal, listen!"

Dude's only reply was to clutch his enemy a

little tighter, and to try and knock the revolver from his hand.

The desperado laughed sardonically.

"Think yer smart, don't yer. Wal, now, Dude Grier, of yer don't let go, I'll send er bullet clear through ther skull uv ther girl, thar."

Dude Grier, shuddered. For the first time he saw the danger of Lucy Laurent.

Townley understood his feelings, and before he could utter a sound, whispered:

"Say er word, an' I'll do it anyhow. I hev ther drop on her. Afore she could turn I'd hev laid her out. An' I'll do it ef yer don't do ez I tell yer."

"What do you want?"

"Let go uv my arm, an' then git. I'm goin' ter marry ther thar gal. I've sworn it. Ef you hedn't come up hyar now I'd hev hed her safe by this time."

"You rascal!" groaned Dude Grier.

Townley chuckled.

"Yes, when er feller hez ther best uv yer, he's allers er rascal. Hows'er, that's nothin'. I'm goin' ter hev that gal, I tell yer."

"Never!"

"Wal, ef I don't, no one else gits her."

Dude Grier tried again to obtain control of the mocking villain, but his right arm was getting very weak, and the left, with a rifle ball in it, was causing him exquisite pain.

If he could only attract the attention of Lucy without letting him know it.

"Wal, what ar' yer goin' ter do?" demanded Townley, as he swung his revolver easily in his hand as if anxious to pull the fatal trigger.

Dude's answer was to thrust his foot behind that of his enemy and try to throw him down.

The trick was well executed, and if Dude Grier had had both arms, would no doubt have been successful. As it was, he succeeded only in staggering the other, without overthrowing him.

Townley's face became livid with rage.

"All right. I give yer er chance an' yer w'u'dn't take it."

"You wretch!" cried Dude Grier, in a fury.

At this moment, Bob's face appeared above the edge of the path. He was pulling himself up by the shrubbery and inequalities of rock on the face of the mountain.

Townley and Dude saw him at the same moment, but with entirely different emotions.

"Ah! Bob!" shouted Dude Grier.

"The deuce!" growled Townley.

"Thank you!" answered the detective, politely, with as much ease as if he were meeting an acquaintance at a private party.

Lucy was bending over her father, with the same stony look of despair, mingled with a determination to have vengeance, that had been there since her father was shot down by the man who now declared he would have her for a wife.

For a moment Townley seemed to hesitate. Then he took deliberate aim at the head of Lucy Laurent and fired.

By a herculean effort Dude Grier had managed to throw up the arm of the desperado at the critical moment, and the bullet had missed its mark, though almost touching the girl's hair that was waving over her head in the soft breeze.

With a howl of baffled rage, Townley fired again, but this time the girl was saved by her own involuntary act. She dropped forward upon her father's shoulders to look into his face, in which, for the first time since he had fallen, she detected signs of life.

Townley was now mad with rage.

"Cuss her! I'll do it now. No one shall hev her! She's mine! She's mine!"

He tore himself away from Arthur Grier and sprung upon the girl like a tiger.

The attack seemed to bring her to herself.

She turned fiercely and tried to use her revolver, but Townley had seized it, and held it so that the muzzle pointed into the air.

She struggled to get the weapon around so that it should be aimed at her antagonist, and pulled the trigger, one, two, three times!

"You beautiful devil!" yelled Townley, not knowing what he said, in his excitement. "I love you, and yet I hate yer! You're mine!"

With a mighty effort he wrenched the revolver out of Lucy's hand and threw it far over the cliff.

"Now, Lucy Laurent, choose me fer er husband or yer executioner."

"Wretch! I'd rather die than hev yer tech me," she cried.

Dude Grier seized Townley by the throat and pressed with all his force.

But even this could not quell the desperado.

Black in the face, with eyes and tongue protruding under the awful pressure, he leveled his revolver at the girl's heart.

"Now I hev yer!" he shouted.

But he never pulled the trigger!

The sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness, and, with one shriek, Jim Townley fell back, dead, with a bullet in his heart.

"I'm sorry I had to do that. I would rather have taken him back to Chicago alive. But, perhaps, it is as well. He won't trouble us any more."

Thus spoke the detective, as he dropped upon

an old log and coolly examined his rifle, as if shooting down a tough were the most natural of tasks for him to perform.

Dude Grier rushed to the side of Lucy, and raised her, unresistingly, to her feet.

"My poor father!" she murmured, with dry, hot lips, as she raised her tearless eyes to her lover's face.

The detective stepped over to the old man, felt his pulse, and placed his hand over his heart.

"Arthur," he said, "take the girl down to the house."

Dude Grier led Lucy down the path, she walking with him without objection, while The Professor took his own handkerchief from his pocket, and reverently covered the dead face of the old man.

Then he bent over the body of Jim Townley, and repossessing himself of the precious papers that had already cost three lives, followed Dude Grier and Lucy Laurent to the house in which he had left 'Squire Caldwell in charge of Guerillo, the Mexican.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MURDER WILL OUT.

BESS MORROW, when permitted to go to her dead feather's home, soon got things into business-like shape.

Although her father's untimely death, and the accusation of herself as his murderer, weighed upon her spirits, she was too full of natural vigor to be cast down utterly.

She soon had the shutters open, and the goods displayed to the best advantage, to say nothing of dusting and brightening everything that was susceptible of such improvement.

"Wal, I should jist like ter git that feller Mat Clark, inter my hands fer five minutes, an' ef I wouldn't make him sick, then my name ain't Bess Morrow."

She worked about in the store and other parts of the house until she felt almost cheerful. In fact, she burst out into little bursts of song now and then, revealing a very musical voice.

The day wore on. Miners and others dropped in occasionally for supplies, and sometimes for whisky, although they drank but little during the day, and were more often customers for flour and coffee than intoxicants.

Bess was busy in the kitchen, when the sound of several voices and the sudden banging open of the front door of the saloon attracted her attention.

"Lucy!"

"Bess!"

With one accord the two young women fell upon each others' necks.

Something seemed to tell Bess Morrow that her friend had suffered a grief similar to her own.

"Bess, he's dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yes. Poor fellow! He had his weaknesses. But—he was my father!"

"Poor Lucy," murmured Bess. "We don't think uv their weaknesses when they're gone."

"Bess," broke in a cheerful voice that she recognized as 'Squire Caldwell's.

"Yes. 'Squire."

"I've been lookin' up their statoots."

"Wal?"

"An' I guess I kin accept ther evidence that you did not kill the deceased Arch Morrow. You kin consider yerself free."

"Why, 'squire, thar's no douht 'bout it. I saw thar that thar Mat Clark do it. My poor father!"

"Wal, Bess, don't cry now. It can't be helped, an' I've got Mat Clark safe. I didn't put him in thet room thet you got out uv so easily," he added, with a sly chuckle.

Lucy Laurent had turned away from Bess Morrow, and now, strangely enough, was leaning trustingly upon the arm of a young man that she had been in the habit of treating in a rather off-hand manner—none other than Arthur—or Dude—Grier.

"Wal, Bess, I jist come down ter tell yer 'bout what I'd found out in ther statoots, and Dude and Lucy Laurent thought ez they'd come down, too."

"Thank you, 'squire. It was very good of you. Lucy, tell me about your father."

The two young women retired to Bess's bedroom, for a confidential talk, and Dude looked inquiringly at the 'squire.

"'Squire, what is to be done about Mat Clark and Guerillo? Shall I be required to testify in either of their cases?"

"Wal, I s'pose so. We'll hev ter hev an inquest on Jim Townley jist ez much ez ef he wuz a squar' man. Ther statoots sez so, yer know."

Dude Grier stepped to the door of the saloon and looked up the street.

Then he stepped into the house again and burst into a fit of hearty laughter.

"Look here, 'squire."

'Squire Caldwell looked up the street and joined Dude Grier in his merriment.

In a few minutes the cause of the laughter was apparent.

Walking down the street, with his attire faultlessly arranged, his derby hat set jauntily on his head, so as to show the favorite bang; his high

collar scraping his chin, his tooth-pick shoes like glass, and his general appearance that of an Eastern city swell, was Boston Bob.

He was beaming good-naturedly through his glasses, and satisfaction was painted in every feature of his face.

But he was not alone.

His white cuffs came partly over his wrists, but the white hands were each holding a prisoner.

He held Guerillo, the Mexican, on one side, and Mat Clark on the other.

The detective was the smaller of the three, and the fact of his holding the two rascals so firmly, and parading them down the street was something to cause astonishment.

But he held them so that they could only do as he desired. Now and then one or the other made a slight attempt to break away, but a sharp shake, that did not seem to cause the detective any unusual exertion brought them to their senses at once, and they realized that there was the strength of a giant in that slight form in the fashionable dress.

"Here they are 'squire," cried Robert, carelessly, as he arrived at the door of the saloon.

"Brought 'em yerself, eh, Professor?"

"Yes, I wanted to get the matter off my hands right away, so that I can start for Chicago in the morning when the stage goes through to Prescott."

"That's right. Nothin' like puttin' things through. Thar's nothin' in ther statoots ter prevent that," said the 'squire.

The detective brought his prisoners into the saloon and released them, but kept them covered with a revolver in each hand.

"Now, Mat Clark, we'll 'tend to your case first," observed the 'squire, leaning against the bar and assuming his judicial aspect.

Clark looked sulkily about him with his piercing black eyes and a sneer wrinkled his yellow face.

"Whar is she?" he asked.

"Whar is who?" was the counter query of 'Squire Caldwell.

But there was no occasion to answer the question. Bess Morrow entered the room at this moment and Clark's yellow face turned a horrible green.

For a moment Mat and Bess looked full into each other's faces.

Then Bess walked forward slowly and stealthily, like a panther preparing to attack its victim.

Mat's beady black eyes scintillated. He was like one charmed by a rattlesnake.

Every one in the room except the detective seemed to be paralyzed with expectation. Robert leaned easily against the bar with his six-shooter in his hands ready for business, and watched the proceedings with an amused smile.

"Bess will scratch those eyes of his out if he doesn't take care of himself," was his mental observation.

His prediction seemed likely to fulfilled when Bess walked up to Mat, and with her face a few inches from his, hissed:

"Mat Clark, you know you killed my father."

For a moment an expression of bravado stole into his face, and he opened his eyes as if about to make some mocking reply.

But he did not do so.

Bess turned suddenly, and pointing to a certain spot in the room, shrieked:

"See! There! There! My father is sitting, when your knife flies at his throat, and he is dead!"

The effect of these words, delivered in the awful tones of one who sees in the spirit what she describes was awful!

The yellow-faced wretch fell in a groveling heap at the feet of the woman thus denouncing him, while he stammered:

"Yes. Yes. I did! I did! I—I—killed him! Mercy! Mercy! Bess! Mercy!"

Bess Morrow did not answer. She bestowed one contemptuous look upon the miserable creature at her feet, as if she would have burned him up, and then, with a triumphant glance around her, walked into her room again, where Lucy Laurent sat weeping over the tragic end of her own father.

Mat Clark having confessed his crime in all its details, 'Squire Caldwell turned him over to the authorities of Yuma county, and his trial resulted in his conviction and subsequent execution. He died game, declaring with his last breath that if Bess Morrow had returned his love he might have been a better man.

As that is the threadbare apology of many men who have lived bad lives and are called upon to pay the penalty at last, it is hardly worth serious attention. Mat Clark was innately bad, and no doubt had Bess Morrow favored his suit, he would have led her a wretched life, and caused her more trouble than he did.

No one in Hopeful Gulch expressed regret over the sentence of the law upon Mat Clark.

Boston Bob did not start for Chicago the next morning, as he had intended. The funeral of Silas Laurent took place that day, and Bob, Arthur Grier, 'Squire Caldwell and Bess Morrow were all present.

Lucy showed the grief that only a daughter

can feel over a parent who has not led a life all that could be desired. She thought only of his good qualities as her father was lowered into the grave, but the detective had his own thoughts. Perhaps he saw that it was better for Silas to die thus than to be called to account for certain lawless proceedings in Chicago, that the police would call "receiving stolen property."

When Robert did go to Chicago, with Lucy Laurent and Arthur Grier, it did not take long to settle the girl's claim to the great gold mine near Hopeful Gulch, Yuma county, Southern Arizona.

Among other property that fell to Lucy Laurent, under the will of Hawkins Smail the banker, was a collection of weapons, jeweled and of large value, that had been stolen from his residence one night some years before. Lucy was to have these weapons if they could be found.

It is needless to say that she knew where to find them, although she never knew that her father had come into possession of them through the questionable medium of being a "receiver."

When everything connected with her estate was settled up, Lucy showed her hard common sense in a conversation she had with Arthur Grier:

"Dude, I'm glad ez yer father hez forgiven yer for preferring ther life uv er Arizona miner ter being a bookkeeper in his wholesale house, an' I think you hed better go back to Boston."

"Lucy, you know why I stayed at Hopeful Gulch so long, and now that I can go back and take my rightful position in society, I want you to go back with me."

"That's all right, Dude. I don't mind confessing now that I took er notion ter yer long ago, but I hev some pride, don't yer see?"

"Pride?"

"Yes. I know ez I ain't fitter mix with them ducks ez I'd meet in Boston ez your wife, an' I'm going ter put in er year in a 'cademy in Chicago, to rub off ther rough edges uv my speech. See? I'm pretty well posted on most things, an' I kin snatch a pianer, an' all that, but I want polish—that's ther word—polish!"

Just a year from the time this conversation took place Arthur Grier and Lucy Laurent were married quietly in Chicago, with Bess Morrow, Robert Roberts and 'Squire Caldwell—who had brought Bess to Chicago on purpose—for witnesses.

They spend their time in Boston, but they take occasional trips to Hopeful Gulch where the working of the famous gold-mine has already made Lucy many times a millionaire.

It is a beautiful evening in August, and the rays of the setting sun are making the tops of the pines that clothe the mountains around Hopeful Gulch blood-red and golden by turns.

There are two persons standing in the space in front of Silas Laurent's house on the face of the mountain. They are Bess Morrow and Robert Roberts.

They have been talking very earnestly, and the detective, looking straight into her eyes, is saying:

"Bess, what do you think of me?"

"In what way?"

"If I were to ask you to be my wife—and I do ask it—what would you say?"

"I'll tell you, Professor," she answered decidedly. "You have no time for marrying now. You have only just got that mean Greaser, Guerillo, into ther Penitentiary, an' there are plenty more scoundrels ez you ought ter send ter the same place."

"But, Bess, that is all business," remonstrated the detective.

"And that is enough fer you ter 'tend ter at present."

"Won't you ever marry me, Bess?"

"Mebbe! Some time."

"When?"

"I dunno. P'raps when you've dangled 'bout me fer er year or two."

Robert pulled up his collar and straightened his clothes generally in the old way, as he looked dubiously at the young woman at his side.

Suddenly he appeared to make a resolution, and without a word of warning, threw his arms around her neck and kissed her.

The response was a resounding slap on the face, but there was a twinkle in her eye that told the detective his suit was successful.

The date of the marriage is not yet settled, but Bess Morrow living by herself at Hopeful Gulch and conducting the grocery business with a firm hand that compels respect from her miner patrons, smiles with an air of proprietorship, when an old newspaper or some passengers on the Prescott stage-coach bring to the out-of-the-way spot in Southern Arizona the details of some new exploit of the well-known detective, with the fashionable clothes and iron nerves, Robert the Te ror.

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 496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
 487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
 480 Hawkspear, the Man with a Secret.
 484 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
 460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
 453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
 447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
 441 The California Sharp.
 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
 421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
 407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
 392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
 382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
 365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
 352 The Desperate Dozen.
 347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
 340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
 335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
 321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
 294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
 278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand.

BY WM. G. PATTEN.

715 Double-Voice Dan on Deck.
 702 Double-Voice Dan, the Always-on-Deck Detective.
 696 Double-Voice Dan, the Go-it Alone Detective.
 689 The Sparkler Sharp.
 676 Hurricane Hal, the Cowboy Hotspur.
 661 Old True Blue, the Trusty.
 663 The Giant Sport; or, Sold to Satan.
 656 Old Plug Ugly, the Rough and Ready.
 648 Gold Glove Gid, the Man of Grit.
 641 Aztec Jack, the Desert Nomad.
 631 Colonel Cool, the Santa Fe Sharp.
 602 Captain Nameless, the Mountain Mystery.
 571 Old Dismal, the Range Detective.
 545 Hustler Harry, the Cowboy Sport.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

323 Hotspur Hugh; or, The Banded Brothers.
 311 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
 305 Silver-Plated Sol, the Montana Rover.
 291 Horseshoe Hank, the Man of Big Luck.
 285 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
 276 Texa Chick, the Southwest Detective.
 271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
 266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
 263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
 258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
 245 Barranca Bill, the Revolver Champion.
 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
 227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
 223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
 219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
 202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
 194 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
 176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.

BY SAM S. HALL—“Buckskin Sam.”

511 Paint Pete, the Prairie Patrol.
 371 Gold Buttons; or, The Up Range Pards.
 358 The Prince of Pan Out.
 342 Blanco Bill, the Mustang Monarch.
 323 King Kent; or, The Bandits of the Basin.
 322 The Crimson Coyotes; or, Nita, the Nemesis.
 309 Raybold, the Rattling Ranger.
 301 Boulder Bill; or, The Man from Taos.
 293 Stampede Steve; or, The Doom of the Double.
 287 Dandy Dave and his Horse, White Stocking.
 282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Carl's Revenge.
 273 Mountain Mose, the Gorge Outlaw.
 269 The Bayou Bravo; or, The Terrible Trail.
 264 The Crooked Three.
 256 Double Dan, the Dastard; or, The Pirates.
 250 The Rough Riders; or, Sharp Eye, the Scourge.
 244 Merciless Mart, the Man Tiger of Missouri.
 239 The Terrible Trio; or, The Angel of the Army.
 225 Rocky Mountain Al; or, The Waif of the Range.
 221 Desperate Duke, the Gaudaloupe "Galoot."
 217 The Serpent of El Paso; or, Frontier Frank.
 212 The Brazos Tigers; or, The Minute Men.
 204 Big Foot Wallace, the King of the Lariat.
 199 Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver.
 195 The Lone Star Gambler; or, Magnolia's Maid.
 191 The Terrible Tonkaway; or, Old Rocky's Pards.
 186 The Black Bravo; or, The Tonkaway's Triumph.
 178 Dark Dashwood, the Desperate.
 90 Wild Will, the Mad Ranchero.
 3 Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot.

BY COL. THOMAS H. MONSTERY.

322 Spring-Heel Jack; or, The Masked Mystery.
 262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Toughs.
 236 Champion Sam; or, The Monarchs of the Show.
 169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
 157 Mourad, the Mameluke; or, The Three Sword masters.
 150 El Rubio Bravo, King of the Swordsmen.
 143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nihilist League.
 126 The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.
 82 Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

657 Long Tom, the Privateer.
 633 The Sea Spy.
 621 The Red Privateer; or, The Midshipman Rover.
 584 Fire Feather, the Buccaneer King.
 517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.
 361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.
 270 Andros, the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter.
 122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
 111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
 61 Captain Seawolf, the Privateer.
 23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.
 18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
 16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.
 14 Thayendanegea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp.
 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.
 348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
 337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
 298 L'gger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
 209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

267 The White Squaw.
 234 The Hunter's Feast.
 228 The Maroon. A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah.
 213 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter.
 213 The War Trail; or, The Hunt of the Wild Horse.
 208 The White Chief. A Romance of Mexico.
 200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
 74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Lake Queen.
 66 The Specter Barque. A Tale of the Pacific.
 55 The Scalp Hunters. A Romance of the Plains.
 12 The Death-Shot; or, Tracked to Death.
 8 The Headless Horseman.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

713 Detective Burr's Spirit Chase.
 706 Detective Burr's Seven Clues.
 698 Thad Burr, the Invincible.
 690 The Matchless Detective.
 680 XX, the Fatal Clew.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glingal.
 87 The Scarlet Captain; or, Prisoner of the Tower.
 53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of Deadwood City.

BY JACKSON KNOX—“Old Hawk.”

643 Caslemaine, the Silent Sifter.
 616 Magnus, the Weird Detective.
 606 The Drop Detective.
 595 Wellborn, the Upper Crust Detective.
 582 Joram, the Detective Expert.
 574 Old Falcon's Double.
 561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Foe.
 548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
 536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Detective's Swell Job.
 515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
 509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
 501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
 494 The Detective's Spy.
 483 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
 477 Dead-arm Brandt.
 467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
 462 The Circus Detective.
 451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
 444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.

MISCELLANEOUS.

566 The Dauntless Detective; or, The Daughter Avenger. By Tom W. King.
 542 The Ocean Drift; or, The Fight for Two Lives. By A. F. Holt.
 534 Green Mountain Joe; or, The Counterfeiter's Cave. By Marmaduke Dey.
 518 Royal Richard, the Thoroughbred. By J. W. Osborn.
 410 Sarah Brown, Detective. By K. F. Hill.
 366 The Telegraph Detective. By George H. Morse.
 353 Bart Brennan; or, The King of Straight Flush. By John Cuthbert.
 350 Flash Falcon, Society Detective. By W. J. Cobb.
 312 Kinkfoot Karl, the Mountain Scourge. By Morris Redwing.
 275 The Smuggler Cutter. By J. D. Conroy.
 261 Black Sam, the Prairie Thunderbolt. By Col. Jo Yards.
 190 The Three Guardsmen. By Alexander Dumas.
 179 Conrad, the Convict. By Prof. Gildersleeve.
 166 Owlet, the Robber Prince. By S. R. Urban.
 158 The Doomed Dozen. By Dr. Frank Powell.
 152 Captain Ironnerve, the Counterfeiter Chief.
 146 The Doctor Detective. By George Lemuel.
 144 The Hunchback of Notre Dame. By Victor Hugo.
 140 The Three Spaniards. By Geo. Walker.
 133 Rody the Rover. By William Carleton.
 125 The Blacksmith Outlaw. By H. Ainsworth.
 110 The Silent Rifleman. By H. W. Herbert.
 102 The Masked Band. By George L. Aiken.
 78 The Mysterious Spy. By Arthur M. Grainger.
 76 The Queen's Musketeers. By George Albany.
 68 The Fighting Trapper. By Capt. J. F. C. Adams.
 60 Wide Awake, the Robber King. By F. Dumont.
 32 B'hys of Yale; or, The Scraps of Collegians.
 11 Midshipman Easy. By Captain Marryatt.
 10 Vidoc, the French Police Spy. By himself.
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 683 Bob Breeze, the Rounder Detective.
 675 Steel Surry, the Sport from Sunrise.
 668 Solemn Saul's Luck Strak.
 661 The Get-There Sharp.
 651 Silvertip Steve, the Sky Scraper from Siskiyou.
 645 Gopher Gabe, the Unseen Detective.
 636 Dandy Darling, Detective.
 627 Mossback Mose, the Mountaineer.
 617 The Grip Sack Sharp's Even up.
 597 Big Bandy, the Brigadier of Brimstone Butte.
 588 Sandy Sands, the Sharp from Snap City.
 576 Silver-Tongued Sid; or, Grip Sack Sharp's Sweep.
 564 The Grip-Sack Sharp; or, The Seraphs of Sodom.
 555 Grip-Sack Sid, the Sample Sport.
 547 The Buried Detective; or, Saul's Six Sensations.
 541 Major Magnet, the Man of Nerve.
 535 Dandy Dutch, the Decorator from Dead-Lift.
 527 Dandy Andy, the Diamond Detective.
 514 Gabe Gunn, the Grizzly from Ginseng.
 504 Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba.
 495 Rattlepate Rob; or, The Roundhead's Reprisal.
 488 The Thoroughbred Sport.
 474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.
 466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
 458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
 450 The Rustler Detective.
 443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
 438 Oklahoma Nick.
 433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
 426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Secret Service Spy.
 416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
 409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
 403 The Nameless Sport.
 395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
 387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
 379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
 372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
 367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
 360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
 355 Stornay Steve, the Mad Athlete.
 351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
 345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
 339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
 331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
 324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
 317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
 302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
 292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
 286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
 283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
 257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Man 'Way Back.
 249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
 241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
 233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
 201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
 197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.
 180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
 170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
 165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
 154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
 141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
 127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner.
 119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
 105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
 88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
 71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
 67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
 64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
 50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
 47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
 45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
 40 Long-Haired Pards; or, The Tarters of the Plains.
 30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw.
 28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

714 Gabe Gall, the Gambolier from Great Hump.
 708 Spokane Saul, the Samaritan Suspect.
 692 Dead-Shot Paul, the Deep-Range Explorer.
 655 Strawberry Sam, the Man with the Birthmark.
 646 Dark John, the Grim Guard.
 638 Murdock, the Dread Detective.
 623 Dangerous Dave, the Never-Beaten Detective.
 611 Alkali Abe, the Game Chicken from Texas.
 596 Rustler Rube; the Round-Up Detective.
 585 Dan Dixon's Double.
 575 Steady Hand, the Napoleon of Detectives.
 563 Wyoming Zeke, the Hotspur of Honey-suckle.
 551 Garry Kean, the Man with Backbone.
 539 Old Doubledark, the Wily Detective.
 531 Saddle-Chief Kit, the Prairie Centaur.
 521 Paradise Sam, the Nor'-West Pilot.
 513 Texas Tartar, the Man With Nine Lives.
 506 Uncle Honest, the Peacemaker of Hornets' Nest.
 498 Central Pacific Paul, the Mail Train Spy.
 492 Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter.
 486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
 479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassafras.
 470 The Duke of Dakota.
 463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
 455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
 449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
 442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
 437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
 385 Will Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, California Bloodhound.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS.

709 Lodestone Lem, the Champion of Chestnut Burr.
 695 Singer Sam, the Pilgrim Detective.
 688 The River Rustlers.
 673 Stuttering Sam, the Whitest Sport of Santa Fe.
 666 Old Adamant, the Man of Rock.
 618 Kansas Karl, the Detective King.
 552 Prince Primrose, the Flower of the Flock.
 528 Huckleberry, the Foot-Hills Detective.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

704 Invisible Ivan, the Wizard Detective.
 685 The Red-skin Sea Rover.
 679 Revello, the Pirate Cruiser; or, The Rival Rovers.
 672 The Red Rapier; or, The Sea Rover's Bride.
 662 The Jew Detective; or, The Beautiful Convict.
 658 The Cowboy Clan; or, The Tigress of Texas.
 653 The Lasso King's League. A companion Story to "Buck Taylor, the Saddle King."
 640 The Rover's Retribution.
 635 The Ex-Buccaneer; or, The Stigma of Sin.
 630 The Sea Thief.
 625 Red Wings; or, The Gold Seekers of the Bahamas.
 615 The Three Buccaneers.
 610 The Red Flag Rover; or, White Wings of the Deep.
 605 The Shadow Silver Ship.
 600 The Silver Ship; or, The Sea Scouts of '76.
 593 The Sea Rebel; or, Red Rovers of the Revolution.
 587 Conrad, the Sailor Spy; or, True Hearts of '76.
 581 The Outlawed Skipper; or, The Gantlet Runner.
 560 The Man from Mexico.
 553 Mark Monte, the Mutineer; or, The Branded Brig.
 546 The Doomed Whaler; or, The Life Wreck.
 540 The Fleet Scourge; or, The Sea Wings of Salem.
 530 The Savages of the Sea.
 524 The Sea Chaser; or, The Pirate Noble.
 516 Chatard, the Dead-Shot Duelist.
 510 El Moro, the Corsair Commodore.
 493 The Scouts of the Sea.
 489 The Pirate Hunter; or, The Ocean Rivals.
 482 Ocean Tramps; or, The Desperadoes of the Deep.
 476 Bob Brent, the Buccaneer; or, the Red Sea Raider.
 469 The Lieutenant Detective; or, the Fugitive Sailor.
 457 The Sea Insurgent; or, The Conspirator Son.
 446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
 435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
 430 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
 425 The Sea Sword; or, The Ocean Rivals.
 418 The Sea Siren; or, The Fugitive Privateer.
 399 The New Monte Cristo.
 393 The Convict Captain.
 388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch.
 377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
 373 Sailor of Fortune; or, The Barnegat Buccaneer.
 369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
 364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
 346 Ocean Guerrillas; or, Phantom Midshipman.
 341 The Sea Desperado.
 336 The Magic Ship; or, Sandy Hook Freebooters.
 325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermits.
 318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
 307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
 281 The Sea Owl; or, The Lady Captain of the Gulf.
 259 Cutlass and Cross; or, the Ghouls of the Sea.
 255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
 246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
 235 Red Lightning, the Man of Chance.
 231 The Kid Glove Miner; or, The Magic Doctor.
 224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
 220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
 216 The Corsair Planter; or, Driven to Doom.
 210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
 205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
 198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
 184 The Ocean Vampire; or, The Castle Heiress.
 181 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
 177 Don Diablo, the Planter-Corsair.
 172 Black Pirate; or, The Golden Fetters Mystery.
 163 The Mad Mariner; or, Dishonored and Disowned.
 155 The Corsair Queen; or, The Gypsies of the Sea.
 147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman from Texas.
 139 Fire Eye; or, The Bride of a Buccaneer.
 134 Darkey Dan, the Colored Detective.
 131 Buckskin Sam, the Texas Trailer.
 128 The Chevalier Corsair; or, The Heritage.
 121 The Sea Cadet; or, The Rover of the Rigoletts.
 116 Black Plume; or, The Sorceress of Hell Gate.
 109 Captain Kyd, the King of the Black Flag.
 104 Montezuma, the Merciless.
 103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Red Anchor Brand.
 94 Freelance, the Buccaneer.
 89 The Pirate Prince; or, The Queen of the Isle.
 85 The Cretan Rover; or, Zuleikah the Beautiful.
 2 The Dare Devil; or, The Winged Sea Witch.

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710 Buffalo Bill Baffled.
 697 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.
 691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail.
 682 Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail.
 667 Buffalo Bill's Swoop; or, The King of the Mines.
 649 Buck Taylor, the Saddle King.
 644 Buffalo Bill's Bonanza.
 *639 The Gold King; or, Montebello, the Magnificent.
 629 Daredeath Dick; or, Buffalo Bill's Daring Role.
 *599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pards of the Plains
 517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.
 *414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
 *401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
 *397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
 *394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
 362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
 329 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge.
 *319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
 *304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
 *243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.
 158 The Doomed Dozen; or, Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts.
 117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard.
 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.
 *83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
 *53 Death-Trailer, the Chief of Scouts.

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR.

448 Hark Kenton, the Traitor.
 188 The Phantom Mazeppa; or, The Hyena.
 156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo.
 142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.
 117 Dashing Dandy; or, The Hotspur of the Hills.
 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

708 Joe Phenix's Siren.
 700 Joe Phenix's Unknown.
 681 Joe Phenix's Specials.
 674 Uncle Sun Up, the Born Detective.
 670 The Lightweight Detective.
 665 The Frisco Detective; or, The Golden Gate Find.
 660 The Fresh in Montana.
 652 Jackson Blake, the Bouncer Detective.
 647 The Fresh of Frisco at Santa Fe.
 637 Joe Phenix in Crazy Camp.
 632 Joe Phenix's Master Search.
 628 Joe Phenix's Combin'.
 620 Joe Phenix's Silent Six.
 613 Keen Billy, the Sport.
 607 Old Benzine, the "Hard Case" Detective.
 601 Joe Phenix's Shadow.
 594 Fire Face, the Silver King's Foe.
 586 The Silver Sharp Detective.
 577 Tom of California.
 570 The Actress Detective; or, The Invisible Hand.
 562 Lone Hand, the Shadow.
 556 Fresh, the Sport-Chevalier.
 537 Blake, the Mountain Lion.
 529 The Fresh in New York.
 520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo.
 497 The Fresh in Texas.
 490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
 475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
 465 The Actor Detective.
 461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
 440 The High Hor.e of the Pacific.
 423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
 419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
 391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
 384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
 376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
 363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
 354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
 349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
 320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
 196 La Marmoset, the Leetive Queen.
 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
 161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
 130 Captain Volcano, or, The Man of Red Revolvers.
 112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
 101 The Man from New York.
 97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
 93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
 84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
 81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
 79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
 77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
 75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
 72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
 63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
 59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
 49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
 42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N.Y.
 41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
 38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
 36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
 35 Kentuck, the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
 34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
 33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
 31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

626 Ducats Dion, the Nabob Sport Detective.
 612 Sheriff Stillwood, the Regulator of Raspberry.
 598 The Dominie Detective.
 591 Duke Daniels, the Society Detective.
 580 Shadowing a Shadow.
 565 Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.
 557 The Mountain Graybeards; or, Riddles' Riddle.
 519 Old Riddles, the Rocky Ranger.
 499 Twilight Charlie, the Road Sport.
 473 Gilbert of Gotham, the Steel-arm Detective.
 452 Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.
 436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pine.
 422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
 390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibuta John's Jubilee.

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716 Buffalo Bill's Scout Shadowers; or, Emerald Ed of Devil's Acre. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
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